

(1). "Three Gates to Paradise".

Intro:- (1). It has been well said: "The undevout astronomer is mad". The man with no spiritual urge within his soul is in danger of becoming a vegetable..stagnant pool where only slime accumulates. Materialism leaves in its train psychological crimples..less than human personalities. For man is incurably God-sick..and never finds rest until finds God. c/f Girl in Russia.."What is written on Sarmia Wall?" Worried..walked 12 miles to see..There it was:- "Religion is the opiate of the people". Fell on knees, crying "Thank God"! Atheism is barely skin-deep. Illus:- Lecturer.."Anyone here claims be atheist"? One man put u hand. "Stand up! Want people see man whose mother died like a dog, and in so doing fulfilled her destiny". Man jumped angrily to feet..face flushed.."That's a lie. She was best of women and has gone to heaven". Then confused!

(2). Deep in heart of mankind..ineradicable consciousness of the eternal. Men encounter death, and say "This cannot be the end." In the 15th century a man stood in Genoa, watching little ships sailing to the west, as Columbus and his men set off beyond the utmost idles into the unknown. He was idly tossing a coin inscribed, "Ne plus ultra".. "There is nothing beyond". "The fools". But there was something beyond. And there is something beyond what we see..Heb. 9:27..Heaven and a hell..A Paradise and Prison. Milton expressed greatest tragedy of eternity when wrote "Paradise Lost"..and greatest hope of humanity "Par. regain. And in some form..this is goal..cry of all religion..univer

I. Today invite take time think about Paradise. What is it

(a). Name means "A Royal Park"..orchard..fruit trees of all kinds..prepared for enjoyment of those who enter. In very real sense Garden of Eden was Paradise for Adam and Eve. Adam pre-dated Paradise..as type of X..last Adam. c/f Gen. 2:7-8..15. Eve created IN Paradise..type of the Church..intended for future Paradise.

(b). Since man fell into sin..driven from that earthly Paradise..earth cursed, ruined..whole history been one of seeking a heavenly Paradise..place of restored communion with God on earth..and unending fellowship after life over. Sin has invaded world with irresistible tide..and physical, earthly Utopia is humanly imposs. Search for sinless land. Useless..would have spoiled immed..carried sin with them.. Might as well saved money..effort..stayed home..read Rom. 3:23. Theory of evol. inverts the truth. Man FELL. DOWN. Sin, disease, war, famine, earthquake, hurricanes, fire and the lightning strike, sorrow, loss, bereavement, pain and death have filled world..making earthly paradise beyond

human attainment. Man's only home is Paradise Beyond. So Paul cries..I Cor. 15:19. "If in this life only we have hope.. And thus many of our hymns voice cry of longing human hearts.. "There's a land that is fairer than day. And by faith we can see it AFAR". "In the sweet by and by..we shall meet..." (c). This is real..certain..safeguarded by God's sure promise. Sweet home of the soul..The strong assurance and comfort of every Christian heart. Paradise ahead! This is what Calvary meant when he described the Celestial City, and said: "All the trumpets sounded for them..and I could have wished myself among them". This was Paul's glowing anticipation:- "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better...Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness". Do not our hearts burn within us as He talks thus with us?

II. The Bible tells us just three things about that coming Paradise

(a). Only mentioned three times..all in N.T. For Paradise is a N.T. affair! O.T. ends with word "curse"..for curse still there..unremoved by millions of animal sac..their rivers of blood. "Not all the blood of beasts, on Jewish altars slain, could give the guilty conscience peace, or wash away the stain" Thus our Lord said..John 3:13 "No man hath ascended up to heaven Not until Calvary was Paradise Regained completely possible..

(b). So we find first mention..Luke 23:43. One of love-liest, most glorious records ever written! THE WAY TO PARADISE REVEALED! Not by good works..gifts..reformations..religion..baptism..earthly priesthood..prayers..confirmation..church membership BY JESUS CHRIST! ..humble, trusting reliance on Him. ~~Extreme~~ gate to Paradise...Its name is REDEMPTION! By blood of Christ, the Heavenly Lamb. The Door..The Way..The Rent Veil..

(c). But just arriving is scarcely enough. Glorious, but only beginning. Bible tells us comparatively little about heaven. God has few surprises in store! "Now we see thru. a glass darkly, but then face to face". Here is second mention of Paradise..

II Cor. 12:1-4. Second ^{inner} gate has title "REVELATION". Paradise will be place of knowing. Mysteries will unfold. Perplexities be resolved. Doubts and debates will be transformed into absolutes. WE SHALL KNOW, AS WE ARE KNOWN.

(d). But this is still not all. The third gate takes us to the very heart of that coming Paradise...Rev.2:7. For this is "REMARRIAGE". A restored union with God that takes us to a place "IN THE MIDST" of the garden of God. Where Adam once was..Gen 2:9a. "In the midst"..where he met God face to face Taking of tree of life..all else shut out..Paradise indeed. We, once severed from God..dead..shall be joined to Him again! In that FUTURE, HEAVENLY PARADISE.

~~Beginning with great inner revelation~~
III. Glorious anticipation! BUT..One inner matter remains.

(a). This is way we find it in Romans 8:18-19, 22-25 We live TODAY in ruined world..Paradise Lost..WAITING for that coming Paradise Regained..in heaven. Is that all? Let me suggest that, as we thus wait, the utmost longing of our hearts ought to be to find PARADISE WITHIN!

Possible? Someone ought write book.."How to be happy though a Christian"! Some gloomy Gus tyres think sinful! Some radiant, glowing happy saints prove it isn't!

(b). Inner Paradise may have many names..."Sanctification" "Spirit-filled".."Crucified with Christ".."Absolute Surrender".."Revival"ner. commonest of all. These all speak of deep longing in X'n hearts for closer walk with God.. restored fellowship..complete oneness with the Saviour. Certainly SOME reach it..Certainly SOME do not.

(c). Let me leave with you one great OF illustration of this NT truth..for OF is our great illus. book (I Cor 10) Out of story of restoration of ~~Israel~~, or rather Judah, from Babylonian captivity to land of Pal..land of blessing. TAC. ON EARTH..let me show 3 steps to Paradise we can all take NOW. Illus. in work of three great men..Zerubbabel..Ezra..Nehem.

1. First step. GATE ONE. RESTORATION THRU. REPENTANCE.

Judah turned back to God..with deep desire for His best. Back of it all..praying of Daniel..moving of God on heart of Cyrus. Always this..Somebody prayed..God moved in sovereign power..Men responded. If want see revival..PRAY. Zerubbabel and company moved back to God's land..God give us such a Divine WANT! Disturb us! Stir us up with sense of hunger, thirst after right. Three men involved..

Sheshbazzar, prince who became governor..--Christ the LORD Zerubbabel, the worker, builder, --Christ the restorer ^{TEMPLE} Jeshua, the priest --Christ our High Priest, Intercessor. First gate to inner Paradise..CHRIST..in surrender..Lord.

2. Second GATE..Typified by Ezra..REVELATION..OF THE WORD. Ezra was the Scribe..ready scribe in Law of Moses.

Followed after Zerubbabel. Ezra 7:10, Neh. 8:1-3, 5, 8. Second gate to inner Paradise is to KNOW THE BOOK. Otherwise there will be unreality, mysticism, extravagances, false fire, fanaticism of some kind. Deep knowledge of the Word of God..by reading, studying, comparing diligently, meditating, cogitating, ruminating..EATING THE WORD..will bring growth, ^{PURITY} maturity, and steadfastness so needed today.

3. THIRD GATE..I have called REMARriage. Typified by work of Nehemiah..the Tirshatha, Governor. Followed Ezra..and completed restoration of Israel. As Zerubbabel built Altar and Temple..so Nehemiah built the WALL of Jerusalem. Why? SIMPLY TO SHUT THE WORLD OUT! And Judah IN..to God. This is "forsaking all others, and cleaving only unto Thee".

And "Paradise Within" is never fully known, enjoyed, until world SHUT OUT..GATES BARRED..LOOKED...and heart wholly re-married to God. This is vital message every part of wonderful Book of Nehemiah. READ IT! It is complete illus. of ROM 7:4. Married to Christ! Living in most intimate fellowship now!

Conclus:- 1. WANT IT? Ev'one of us wants Heavenly Paradise at end of life. We know not on this strife-torn earth...and want that future Paradise. We can be sure of it..I John 5:12-13. But do we WANT PARADISE WITHIN..NOW? It can be ours..thru the three gates..Set heart on worship of and dedication to God. Set heart on knowing His will..word. Set heart on forsaking world, self-life..shut out..and shut in with the Saviour.

2. Last word is this:- This is never external matter..raising hand..walking aisle. THAT CAN BE EASILY DONE. But see this:- When Nehemiah proposed to build that wall of Jerusalem..shut world out..he kept it a SECRET. Read his prayer in chap. one. THE REAL REQUEST IS NOT RECORDED! Why not? See ~~again~~ again:- 2:12, 16. Why? REAL PURPOSING IS INWARD..OF THE HEART..NOT GLIB TALK. c/f 2:12...Dan. 1:8

3. Do we so purpose? I ask you make this closing moment a holy one indeed. "I will seek to exalt God..I will seek to know the Book. I will seek to shut world out, set whole affection on Saviour. And I will know then..Paradise Within".

(Reparation)