

Religious Department.

Edited Weekly by a Minister of the Gospel in Stokes County.

NOTE—Nothing, we opine, will be more interesting, instructing, and uplifting to our readers than a sermon once a week by a local minister of the gospel, from the churches of the county. In offering this space to the preachers, we feel sure they will accept it in the spirit in which it is tendered,—not as a means of doctrinal debate between denominations, but on broader lines—a means of reaching larger audiences than they can possibly find in their churches or from their pulpits, and for the purpose of giving a greater publicity to the work and teachings in which they are so nobly and unselfishly engaged.

This week the space is appropriated to the Presbyterians through their pastor, Rev. Mr. Ervin. Next week we shall offer the department to the use of the Methodists by the Rev. Mr. Routh, of the Danbury and allied churches. After that we hope to have all other denominations in turn fill the space with their writings or sermons—the Baptists, the Lutherans, the Primitive Baptists, the Episcopalians, the Christians, the Friends and so on, all denominations being absolutely welcome to write, and urged to do so.

Cordially,
Editors REPORTER.

The Unmerciful Servant

By REV. C. W. ERVIN,
Pastor of the Presbyterian Churches of Stokes County.

TEXT: Matt. 18:23-35.

Take all the sins of your past life and pile them in a pile. Take the sins of knowledge and the sins committed in ignorance bring hither the sins of omission and of commission; the sins of thought and the sins of deed. Pile them up! Many of those sins are long forgotten as a debt that has long passed out of mind. As one man has said, suppose you should have a picture gallery in which pictures were hanging showing all the sins of your past life from childhood up. As they come trooping back and when you think of the greatness of the debt do they not rise up and condemn you? Are you not ready to fall upon your knees before the Lord and pray for forgiveness?

I think when you consider the greatness of the debt you will not make the mistake of the unmerciful servant in this parable. He foolishly said "have patience with me and I will pay thee all." He was unable to pay it and have you not found yourself in the same condition?

Do you not see that you are utterly unable to pay the debt to Divine Justice? Do not ease your conscience by promises of doing better in the future. It is well that you should do so, but this will not atone for past sins. Do not deceive yourself as some do by promising works of charity to atone for shortcomings in the past. You will only then be doing your duty. Your old debt would still remain. It would still stare you in the face and drive peace away from your soul.

Be honest and own up to your Lord that you have squandered the talents entrusted to you, and spent them upon yourself. Confess with bended knees before your King that you have robbed Him of that which was rightly His: His laws violated and His money gambled away. Be honest and admit that you will never be able to pay the debt.

Take stock of your spiritual goods and see if you are able to pay it. What does all your spiritual possessions amount to in the eyes of the King?

"Here is a bottle almost full of tears,
Bundles of heartless prayers and faithless fears,
Talents grown rusty with long lying by;
A half-strung harp whose music is a sign.

Necklaces strung with vows that once were fair
But broken now or spent in empty air;
Thoughts, feelings, passions all with evil rife,
Neglected duties and a wasted life."

It was the law in that country to sell such a debtor with his family or to have him put in prison or to have him tortured until some of his friends would have compassion on him and pay the debt for him. But notice how readily he is forgiven. "The King had compassion on him and forgave him the debt." Thus is shown the readiness of the King of Kings to forgive the greatest sinner if he but ask for pardon. The mountain of iniquity is taken away.

It is well for every sinner to have a sense of the greatness of his debt to God and of his inability to pay that debt, for until he does realize that he is a debtor to God he is in no position to ask for mercy. But let every one remember the readiness of our King to forgive. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to clean us from all unrighteousness. Come let us reason together saith the Lord: "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow."

"Him that cometh unto me I

will in no wise cast out."

Now what did this servant do when he was forgiven the debt? He went out and found a fellow servant who owed him an hundred pence; he took him by the throat and said, "pay me what thou owest." His fellow servant fell upon his knees and said, "have mercy with me and I will pay thee all." But he cast him in a prison till he should pay the debt. Having received mercy he failed to show mercy. "If we have not the spirit of Christ we are none of His." Jesus had the forgiving spirit. When they nailed Him to the cross He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Stephen had the forgiving spirit for when the cruel stones smote him and the blood gushed from his bruised and mangled form, his last words were "Lord lay not this sin to their charge."

The last few verses of this parable show the punishment of this unforgiving servant: His Lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due unto him. We are reminded of the words of Jesus in Matt. 7:1-5, for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.

Our Lord has taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." He makes it as plain as words can

that if we expect to be forgiven we must be ready to forgive others.

"Revenge is a naked word,
It has neither hilt nor guard,
Wouldst thou wield this brand of the Lord?
Is thy grasp then firm and hard?
But the closer thy clutch on the blade,
The deadlier wound thou wouldst deal.
Deeper wound in thy hand is made,
'Tis thy blood reddens the steel."
And when thou hast dealt the blow—
When the blade from thy hand has flown—
Instead of the heart of the foe,
Thou mayst find it sheathed in thine own."

Shall you and I, my brother, who have received such mercy deny that mercy to others? God forbid! Hear the words of Jesus in Matt. 6:14-15: "If ye forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you your trespasses. But if you forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father in heaven forgive you your trespasses."

Let the spirit of our blessed master shine through our faces and dominate our lives as we go in and out among our fellowmen; then we shall know that the quality of mercy is not strained.
"It falleth down as the gentle rain from heaven
To the earth beneath. It is twice blessed,
It blesses him that gives and him that takes;
It becomes the throned monarch better than his crown."

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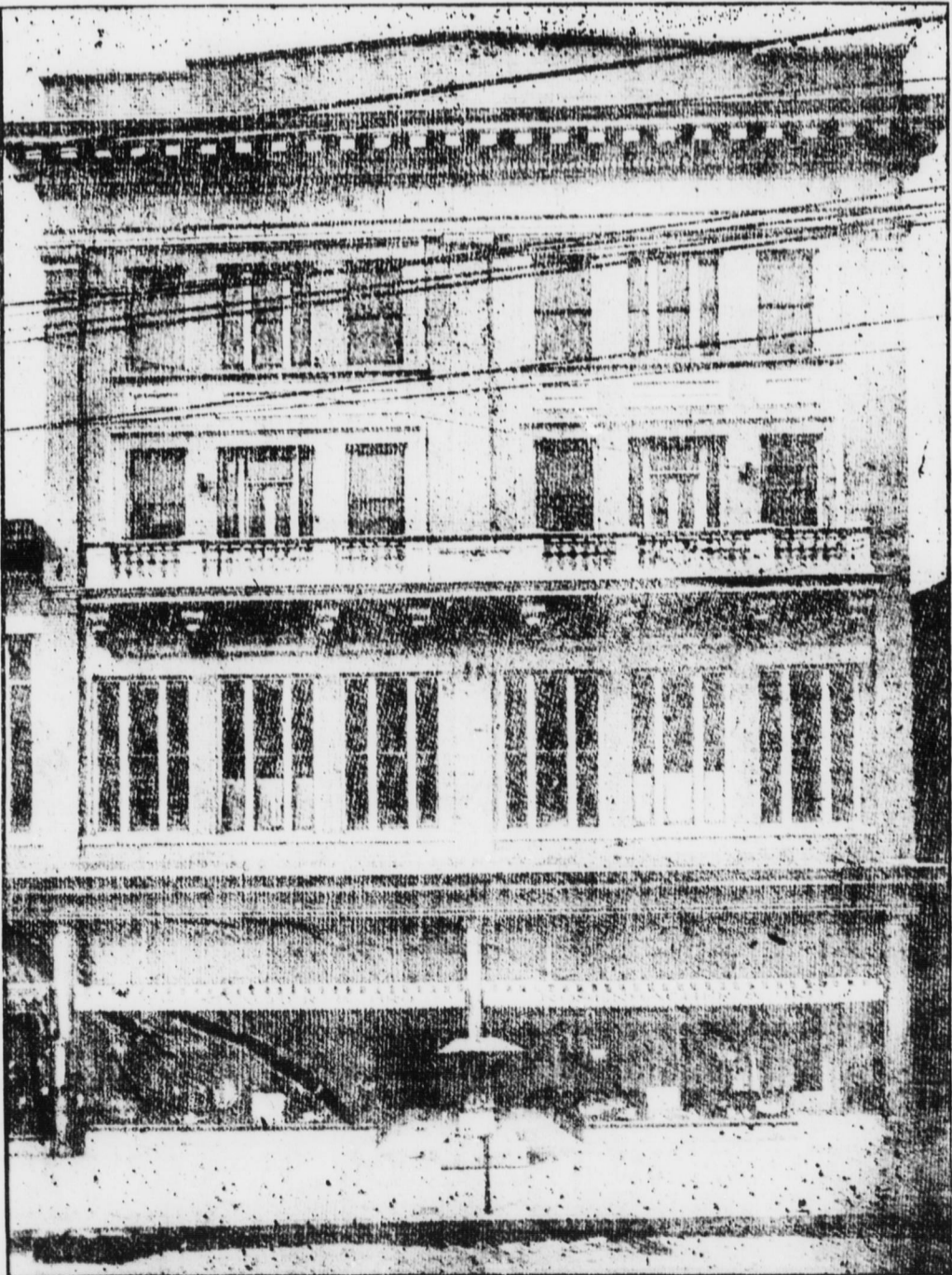
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