

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

earnest and intense. But, after all, we do not *disbelieve* in them. It may be that in another world *all* the elements of our religious life will reappear in all their balanced fulness, and that *then* the holy angels will be *our* angels once more. And so the poet's words may come true in another sense than that in which he intended them, and we shall find that

with the morn, those angel-faces smile,
Which we have loved long since, and lost awhile.

R. WINTERBOTHAM.

THE KIND MASTER.

ST. LUKE xii. 35-38.

THIS parable of the Kind Master is the complement of that of the Dutiful Servant, recorded in St. Luke xvii. 7-10, of which I gave an exposition last month. The one of these parables without the other is not perfect. We must take the two together if we would get a large and rounded view of the truth common to them both.

It is hardly possible to listen to the latter parable without feeling, at least at first, that it is alien to the usual tone of our Lord, that it is not in accord with the key in which most of his utterances are set. It is not like Him to tell us that our life is an endless series of exhausting duties, for which we are to look for no thanks. It is not like Him to bid us remember that, even when we have done "all the things which are commanded us," we have done no more than it was our duty to do, and must confess that we are but "unprofitable servants."

We need, therefore, to remind ourselves that this hard and severe view of human life falls in with many

of the facts of human experience—that it fairly represents the lot of myriads ; for there are myriads among us whose life is mere labour and endurance, with no love, no cordial approbation, to brighten it. We need to reflect that this view of life *as duty* is very bracing to weak and tender minds, very stimulating to the strong and brave, and supplies a most wholesome rebuke to those who value religion mainly, if not solely, for *the comfort* it supplies. And, above all, we need to remember that this view of human life, though it be very true and wholesome so far as it goes, is not, and does not profess to be, a complete view. It by no means follows that, because we call ourselves unprofitable servants, God will call us unprofitable ; He may call us “good and faithful servants.” Because we say modestly and humbly, “We have only done that which it was our duty to do,” it by no means follows that God will not think that, in doing our duty, we have done much. Because we do our duty “not looking for reward,” it by no means follows that we shall have no reward. On the contrary, we know that the less we think of ourselves, the more God thinks of us ; the less we care for reward, the greater our reward ; the more dutiful and lowly our spirit, the more highly we shall be exalted.

We must not expect to find the whole truth in any one parable, however beautiful it may be. We must compare parable with parable. And no sooner do we compare the parable of the Dutiful Servant with that of the Kind Master than our conceptions of God’s relation to us, and of our relation to Him, are enlarged and rendered more complete. For if the one teaches us how to think of ourselves, the other teaches us how God thinks of us, when we do that which it is our duty

to do. While the one sets forth the diligence and lowliness of the servant, the other sets forth the friendliness and bounty of the Master. As we have studied the one parable, then, let us also study the other.

And, first, let us glance at the form of the parable. The form of it is this. A certain Oriental gentleman, or "lord," has gone to the wedding of a friend. The festivities connected with an Eastern marriage were spread over many days, a week at least, sometimes a month. All the friends of the family were expected to put in an appearance, but only a select few remained to the end. The rest might come and go at any hour, on any day, that suited their convenience or pleasure. So that when *this* Hebrew gentleman went to his friend's wedding, his servants could not tell to an hour, or to a watch, or even to a day, when he would return. But, however long he delayed his coming, they kept a keen look-out for him. When night fell, instead of barring up the house and retiring to rest, they girt up their long outer robes, that they might be ready to run out at any instant to greet him; they kindled their lamps, that they might run safely, as well as swiftly, on his errands. They even prepared a table for him; for, though he was coming from a feast, he may have had to ride far and long, and, in any case, a little fruit and a cup of pure water or of generous wine might be very acceptable to him. In this posture, with these preparations, they await his coming. And when he comes, he is so pleased with their fidelity and thoughtfulness that, instead of sitting down to meat or hastening to his couch, he girds up his loins, bids his servants sit down to the very banquet they had prepared for him, and comes forth from his chamber to wait upon them.

The contrast between these two parables is plain and obvious. *This* parable is as winning and friendly and gracious in its tone, as *that* is hard and cold and stern. *There* we have a master who, when his weary servants come in from ploughing the field and tending the cattle, bids them gird themselves and serve him; while *here* we have a master who, though he has just come off a journey, girds himself, invites his servants to his own table, and serves them with his own hands.

And, perhaps, we best enter into the spirit of both parables, if we take the one to set forth God, our Master, as dutiful men, such as the better Pharisees, conceived Him to be; and take the other to set forth God as He is in Himself, as Jesus knew Him to be:—the best men of that time thinking of Him as a just but austere Master, Jesus knowing Him to be the Friend and Father of men. Or, possibly, we may enter into the spirit of these parables if we take the one as setting forth our life in *this world*, and the other as depicting our life in *the world to come*. *Here*, though God does indeed most truly minister to us every moment that we breathe, his kindness is in much veiled from us, and our life appears a succession of difficult and arduous duties which leave but little room for rest. *There*, while we may have still more arduous and difficult duties to discharge, the kindness of God our Saviour will become more and more manifest to us; we shall see and feel that He is always ministering to us, always giving us the strength we need for duty, and so making duty itself our delight.

But these are only conjectural and fanciful interpretations of the Scripture before us, and from these we must turn to the main, and plain, lessons it is de-

signed to enforce. The two main points of the parable are *the watchfulness of the servants* and *the kindness of their master*. They wait for him ; he waits on them. They watch for his coming ; and, when he comes, he makes them sit down at the table they had spread for him, and serves them with generous and kindly hands. What does the watchfulness of the servants symbolize ? and what the bountiful and friendly kindness of the master ?

The answer to the first of these questions is too plain to be missed. As the servants of the parable waited for the coming of their master, so we are to wait for the coming of our Master. The second advent of Christ is the great and special promise of the New Testament, as his first advent was the great and distinctive promise of the Old Testament. And we are taught again and again, both in the parables of our Lord and in the Letters of his apostles, to look for that advent, to long for it, to set our hearts and stake our faith upon it. The primitive Church, as we know, did look for it. They expected an *immediate* advent of Christ. They looked for his coming day by day. But for years and ages now we have left off looking for it. The promise still holds its place in our creeds. In our homilies and hymns the phrases in which this great hope once found living expression are still embalmed. But no society can be on the stretch and tip-toe of expectation for eighteen hundred years. And practically, I suppose, no man among us at this late day expects the course and order of the world to be interrupted, to-day or to-morrow, by the advent of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven. We even sneer or jest, not wholly without reason, at the few among

us who still profess to expect a literal fulfilment of the promise, and who fix first this date, and then that, as the day of the great assize—especially if we learn that they themselves are entering into contracts and covenants which, on their own hypothesis, stretch beyond the crack of doom.

Their nauseous insincerity is a fair mark for satire ; and this, together with the unconscious or unreflecting insincerity of thousands more who continue to repeat phrases—once alive, but long since dead—concerning the second advent of our Lord, have brought the whole doctrine under a cloud of suspicion ; insomuch that men who reason as well as believe—and believe all the more sincerely and deeply because they reason—are apt to avoid all mention, if not all thought, of it. And yet can we, any one of us, doubt that a second advent of the Saviour and Ruler of men *is* promised in the New Testament ? Can we doubt that this is the *great* promise of the New Testament ? If not, are we not bound to make it a living reality to our faith, a sustaining hope amid the toils and cares and disappointments of life ? Would it not be wise of us, is it not our duty, before we jest at insincere, or chronological, or too literal interpretations of the promise, to frame some such reasonable conception of it as will make it a real power and a potent factor in our lives ? Are we to give up the great hope which animated and sustained the primitive Church, and that before we have something better to put in its place ? *Must* that be a mere dead blank to us which was a centre of vital and quickening force to them ?

I trust not ; nay, I trow not. There are many ways in which we may hold the same, and yet a better, hope

with those who went before us. But of these it will be enough for my present purpose if I mention only one:

If, then, we take the great promise of the New Testament—the second advent of Christ; if we divest it of all mere accidents of form and date, and reduce it to its most simple and general terms, what does it come to? It comes at least to this: that, somewhere in the future, there is to be a better world than this—a world more wisely and happily ordered, a world in which all that is now wrong will be righted, a world of perfect beauty and growing righteousness; in a word, a world in which He who once suffered for and with all men will really reign in and over all men, his spirit dwelling in them, and raising them towards the true ideal of manhood. And is not that a reasonable hope? Is it not a great hope? Does it not make a vital difference to us whether or not we entertain it?

If in this world only we have hope, we are of all creatures most miserable. It is comparatively easy for the few of us who live in comfort, who have been refined by culture and thought till we can see how the shadows of time lend a new intensity and beauty to its lights, and how pain and suffering are a discipline in wisdom and goodness, to think this world a very tolerable one, and to regard human life as a grand and sacred possession. But think what life is to the countless myriads of our race; think what the world is, and has been, as a whole. Remember how in all ages the vast majority of men have been plagued by toil, by care, by fear, by sordid penury; how they have been crushed under the bloody heels of tyrants who were bound to protect them, maimed and tortured, stultified and coerced, by the very priests who were bound to

enlighten and emancipate them ; how they have been decimated and degraded by war, by famine, by disease, by ignorance, by superstition : and who can deny that, if this world be all, then human life, taken as a whole, is the most fatal of blunders, of curses the most terrible ? If the tragedy of human life be pregnant with no Divine purpose, if there be no better time coming, no golden age of righteousness and peace—if, in short, we can no longer believe in the advent and reign of Christ, then surely every thoughtful spectator of this vast tragedy must say, “ It were better for men that they had never been born ! ”

But if we believe in this great promise, if we cherish this great hope, then can we with patience wait for it. And this is the very posture which our Lord here enjoins. He would have us to be like servants who watch for the coming of their lord, that, when he comes, they may open to him immediately. He would have us believe in, and look for, the advent of a better world, in which all the wrongs of time will be rectified. He would have us sustain ourselves under all the toils and sorrows of our individual lot, and under the still heavier oppressions of the world's lot, by looking forward to that end and purpose of the Lord God Almighty which will vindicate all the ways in which we have been led, and all the painful discipline by which we have been tried and purified and refined. And whosoever holds fast this great hope for himself and for the world at large, he is a true believer in the distinctive promise of the New Testament, viz., the second advent of Christ, and may use with sincerity all the words and phrases in which it has been expressed.

But we have still to answer our second question,

viz., What is signified by the friendly and bountiful kindness of the Master in the parable? He finds his servants girded to wait on him, and he girds himself to wait on them. They have prepared a banquet for him and he bids and invites them to sit down to the very banquet they had prepared. What does *that* mean?

It means, I think, that whatever we have done for God, He will do for us; that, when He reckons with us, we shall receive our own again, and receive it "with usury." It is but a metaphorical expression of that great law of retribution which pervades the whole Bible, but the happier face of which we are too apt to overlook—that whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap, *that*, and all that has come of it.

We know very little of the future life for which Christ has bidden us wait and watch. What we shall be, how He will come, it doth not yet appear. His second advent is as mysterious to *us* as his first advent was to the Jews. But this we know, that, if we cherish the great hope of which I have spoken—the hope of a better life in a bettered world—and live by it, we shall receive according to our deeds, according to our works. Even here Nature gives back to every man what he gives to her—wheat if he sow wheat, barley if he sow barley. But Nature is bountiful as well as just; and, while always yielding to man that which he sows in kind and quality, she also, as a rule, multiplies the seed sown, and gives him back far more than he gave to her. And this rule is to hold throughout our career, in the future no less than in the present life. The Divine reward will be at once equitable and bountiful. If in this present life we have shewn some capacity for serving God in serving our fellows, we may be sure

that in the life to come we shall receive *the harvest* of our service ; we may be sure that God will do for us all that we have done for Him, and a great deal more.

But what, after all, is the best part of a man's reward for a faithful and diligent use of any faculty here ? It is that his faculty, whatever it may be, is invigorated, developed, refined by use. If, then, I have here used my faculty and opportunity for serving God in serving my fellows, I may hope, I may believe, that hereafter my best reward will be an enlarged faculty of service and ampler opportunities for exercising it. If I love men wisely and sincerely even in this world, I win their love in return, and that is a very sweet and precious reward ; but my great reward is that, by loving them and by receiving their love in return, I learn to love them still more wisely and still more cordially. If I love righteousness here, and pursue it, I find all righteous men and influences on my side, and so get my reward ; but my best reward is that I myself am ever growing in righteousness, in the power of teaching and serving it. If I love truth here, and seek it, I find it, and find that my correspondence with the fact and truth of things brings me manifold advantage ; but still my supreme reward is that my capacity for finding truth and living truth grows by what it feeds upon. And in the world to come the same law holds. If I have served the Master, He will serve me ; but He will serve me best and most of all by making me a more skilful, faithful, and happy servant.

This is the great law of retribution, the great law of reward, laid down in the Bible from end to end, confirmed by our daily experience in every province of thought, inquiry, action, and illustrated by the parable

before us. And what we need specially to emphasize is this—how reasonable and equitable a law it is, and how it meets and breaks all those objections to the Christian doctrine of a future life which are so rife just now on the lips and pens of men who, with all their excellences and powers, have not been at the pains of studying the Biblical records for themselves. We are told that the heaven we expect is an arbitrary and capricious reward, out of all proportion to the scale of our previous life, for which we have done little or nothing to prepare ourselves, and having little or no relation to the character we have formed in ourselves, to the capacities and moral qualities we have cherished and developed as we passed through the hours of time. We are charged with “other-worldliness,” and are told that our very hope of reward, our hope that Christ will come in glory to glorify Himself in them that love Him, is selfish and base ; that we ought to love virtue, truth, righteousness, for their own sake, and not for any gain we hope to get thereby. But if we hold the Christian hope as defined by Christ Himself, and by the whole teaching of Scripture, what room is there for such objections and taunts as these ? If I believe that I shall reap hereafter what I have sown here and now ; if I believe that, because I have loved God and man here, He will reward me hereafter with a larger capacity for serving them, is there anything degrading, is there any “eternity of the tabor” in such a reward as that ? Is there anything arbitrary in such a reward as that, or anything unreasonable, or selfish, or base, in my hope that I may receive it ? On the contrary, is it not most reasonable, is it not in accordance with the most scientific interpretation of the facts of observation and

experience, to believe that my capacity for service will grow by use? Is it not a very noble and unselfish reward for having in any measure done my duty here, that I should be able to do it more effectually and more happily hereafter?

Let us watch, then, for the coming and kingdom of Christ; let us cherish the pure unselfish hope that, if we serve Him in this life, He will serve us in the life to come, and serve us most and best of all by making us more capable and accomplished servants.

S. E. C. T.

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST.

X.—JESUS AND THE JEWS.

THERE are three things that at once characterize Jesus and his disciples, and distinguish them from the men who have founded the other great religions of the world. (1) What may be termed their secular and social sanity; (2) the calm religious temper and reasonable religious spirit in which they lived and acted; and (3) the entire absence of political character and motive in their words and works, methods and aims. Men deeply moved tend to become extravagant, the victims of passions so molten as to consume, or so liquefied as to quench, their common sense. When the motives that move are religious, come from the sudden and intense realization of the spiritual and eternal, the extravagance assumes one or both of two forms: either hatred of the world, its comforts, its wealth, its pursuits, whatever is every-day and present, attractive and lovable on earth and in time; or the passion after extraordinary relations, unnatural modes of intercourse with the unseen, ecstasies,