

"THAT SERVANT."

– MARCH 22. – *Luke 12:37-48; Matt. 24:42-51.* –

THIS lesson, from Matthew's account (Matt. 24:42-51), was treated in our issue of April 1, '95. We have no further comment to make except upon one point: "that [special] servant." In our examination of this text we seem to have treated the term "that servant" as though the Spirit had erred in saying "that servant" when it meant servants (plural), and we applied it to *all true* servants of God. Since then we have been met from various quarters with objections to so general an application, and the suggestion that it would be wrong to allow modesty or any other consideration, good or bad, to warp our judgment in the exposition of the inspired Word; to which proposition we agree. God evidently has some purpose in all that he has caused to be written for our admonition; and faithfulness as servants requires that we deliver to the household the Lord's word, as he gives it.

Being unable to answer the objections and arguments raised, we candidly present them to the "fellow-servants" and to the "household" of faith as part of the Lord's message: the subject being forced upon us by its recurrence in the International S.S. Lessons, as well as by inquiries by letter. Let each "fellow servant" and each member of the "household of faith" use his consecrated judgment in accepting or rejecting this exposition, or any other exposition we may ever offer, according to his ability or inability to recognize in it the voice of our great Shepherd.

The objection urged is that the Lord's words clearly mention and distinguish between his "household" (his faithful people in general), the "fellow servants" (plural), and "*that servant*" specially indicated as the Lord's agent in dispensing present truth as food to his "fellow servants" and the "household." It is admitted that in many Scriptures the consecrated are addressed individually when all of a class are

meant, – as, for instance, "To *him* that overcometh I will grant to sit with me in my throne." This, according to the rules of language, means – "To *each one* who overcomes," etc. And in the texts under consideration, it is held that if neither the "household" nor "fellow servants" were mentioned, it might be questionable whether the expression "*that* servant" referred to one or to all faithful servants; but that when "*that* servant" and "*his fellow* servants" and the "household" are all mentioned in one connection, and in *contrast*, it would be a perversion of the rules of language and interpretation to mix and confound that which the holy spirit has so emphatically marked as distinct. It is further urged that to apply the term "his household" to nominal Christian professors in general could not be correct, because the "meat in due season" is intended only for the Lord's truth-hungry, "watching" people; and hence among these must be sought the "household" to be fed, the "servants" (plural) to do the feeding, and "that servant" at whose hands our *present* Lord will dispense the food to "his fellow servants" for "the household;" and who thus is constituted a general steward, overseer and dispenser of the Lord's "goods."

It is urged, further, that the manifest *fulfilment* of this, during this "harvest" and time of the Lord's *presence*, should assist in the correct understanding of the promise; and that when we see things come to pass we should be able to recognize them whether we discerned their meaning in advance or not. Indeed, the demonstration seems to have forced the true interpretation, rather than that an interpretation led to the fulfilment; – which makes the matter really the stronger, now that it is seen.

It is further suggested that whoever occupies the position of "*that* servant" occupies a place of special danger, as well as of special privilege; that only by humility and faithfulness can he continue; and that, although not so stated in the Scriptures, it may be inferred that if the chosen one should fail, another would be chosen to be "*that* servant" or steward through whom the Master would continue

to supply the "meat in due season" to those deemed worthy to continue at his table.

We submit the argument without comment.

It is well to notice that these words are not a parable, but an explanation of a parable (Luke 12:41) recorded in preceding verses (36-40). The parable had set forth the fact that the "powers that be" (ecclesiastical, social and political) would be unaware of our Lord's second advent when it would take place; and that the times and seasons were kept secret specially on their account; because if they were fully convinced of the great events of that time, and their own dissolution to make ready for the Kingdom of God, the "new heavens and new earth," they would alter their course from fear, to perpetuate the present imperfect order, and to hinder the establishment of the better Kingdom. In view of this, our Lord indicates the necessity for faithfulness and watchfulness on the part of his servants, that they may be in such condition as to be quickly and readily made aware of the *presence* of their Master, while "the powers that be" – the present householder – sleeps in ignorance of the true state of affairs, and dreams of his own greatness and prosperity. The parable enforces the necessity that all of God's faithful servants be constantly prepared and ready, so that as soon as the "knock" is given, they may recognize it, and open their hearts and minds to the fact of the Lord's *presence*, and, as his "household," all sit down to enjoy the meat in due season which he will then serve, through his visible, human agencies.

After hearing the parable, and perceiving that only the faithful were to know of the matter, Peter was perplexed, and wondered whether the Lord meant that "*all* [faithful brethren]" would sit down to meat and be served by the Master, or whether only "*us* [the twelve];" for he had already discerned that the Lord had some *special* favors for "the twelve" alone. Of course, if Peter had known that the parable would not be fulfilled for over eighteen hundred years, after all the twelve would have died, he would not have asked the question in that

form. But our Lord, without correcting his error, explained this feature of the parable for our information. His answer in verses 42 to 48 (and Matt. 24:44-49) declares that while He will be the real Provider and Servant, yet the food will be dispensed through a steward to "fellow servants" and the "household" in general.

The word "*ruler*" in verses 42,44 and Matt. 24:45,47, of the common version, does not properly express the thought of the original: the Revised Version is preferable: "set over his household *to give them* meat" as a "steward," not as a lord or master – rather a general servant, or servant of all.

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REVIEW. – MARCH 29.

Golden Text. – "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God." – Luke 12:8.

This will be the blessed reward of faithful loyalty. The opposite will be true of all the disloyal. – "But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God." – Verse 9.
