

A KIND MASTER, A GOOD SERVANT.

– *LUKE 7:1-10.* – *APRIL 22.* –

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." – Psalm 103:13.

MASTERS and servants in the olden times occupied a much closer relationship to each other than they do today – a relationship which took on more of paternal sentiment. The change has been brought about gradually, and is not the result of great men of today having less heart than great men of the olden times, nor of employees being less faithful than employees of olden times: it is rather the result of changed conditions – the result of greater individuality and independence, which leads the employee to prefer to sell his time and energy on a strictly commercial basis rather than on a paternal basis. Nevertheless, the general influence is unfavorable in many respects: first, because men of great mental power and influence are to some extent under present arrangements cut off from fellowship and sympathy with their employees, and altho the class distinctions are not less marked than in the past, nor even as much so, yet class rivalry and animosity is possibly greater than ever.

The employer, under present conditions, feels no responsibility for the employee, since he has made a bargain with him for so much money per day, without additional responsibilities, and the employee feels that having obtained the wage bargained for, and having used it according to his own will, he has no further claim upon his employer in case of sickness or other adversity. However, the system has its good features as well as its bad ones, for it should cultivate independence, self-reliance and prudence; nevertheless, all discern that this division between the interests of masters and servants stands closely related to the great time of trouble which now impends.

The lesson of the healing of the centurion's servant at Capernaum strikingly illustrates the affectionate interest that prevailed between some good masters and their good servants in the past. True, we do not have any record that this servant was a good one, yet the inference is here, because the centurion himself was evidently an orderly man, and such men usually seek for and obtain orderly servants. Furthermore, in his conversation with our Lord he declares that he was accustomed to having his servants do what he bade them. – Vs. 8.

The centurion himself was, of course, a Roman – not a Jew. He was, therefore, debarred in a general way from the Lord's blessings, which he declared on another occasion were for the children of the Kingdom (Israelites) only, and not for strangers. No doubt because he realized himself as outside Judaism – an alien and a stranger, and foreigner from the covenants and blessings of God bestowed upon Israel. (Eph. 2:12), that he obtained the co-operation of the leading Jews of the city, that they would favor his cause with the Lord, and intercede that his petition might be granted.

We notice the good deeds of this centurion. He evidently respected the religion of the Jews, and had used his wealth in the building of a synagogue, the ruins of which are supposed to have been found recently. Of these ruins Edersheim says, "The remains now, after eighteen centuries, in their richness of elaborate carvings of cornices and tablets, of capitals and niches, show with what liberal hand he had dealt his votive offerings." It is presumed that this miracle preceded the awakening of Jairus' daughter, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that Jairus himself was one of the elders of the Jews who came to Jesus in the interest of the centurion; and this to some extent helps to account for his great faith in our Lord's power to revive his daughter, even tho dead.

Our Lord seems to have readily granted the centurion's request; and the fact that it was not presented personally is presumed not to signify any lack of respect, but the very reverse, a realization on his

part that Jews were averse to having any dealings with Gentiles, except along strictly business lines. His further modesty and meekness were manifest in the fact that before Jesus had reached his house he sent friends (not servants) to hinder Jesus from defiling himself by coming into a Gentile's house. For altho he was a man of influence and power he realized the barrier between himself and the Jews, according to which the Pharisees would have considered that they defiled themselves by entering his house. He accordingly suggested that our Lord would merely speak the word, and that he had fullest confidence that the word could be spoken as well outside as inside the house – that one possessing such power as the Lord Jesus manifested had agencies at his command which would not require him to personally see and touch the servant in order to heal him, even as the centurion himself was accustomed to perform various matters through the instrumentality of his servants.

This was a wonderful illustration, both of meekness and of faith, and it was appreciated by our Lord accordingly. There is a lesson in it for all of the Lord's people, to the effect that the more we exercise faith in the Lord along reasonable lines, in harmony with the teachings of his Word, the more he will be pleased with us. This same thing was illustrated in the case of Thomas, who, being absent at the time of our Lord's first appearance to the eleven, declared that nothing would satisfy him respecting the Lord's resurrection except the putting of his fingers into the nail-prints of his hands. Our Lord, while granting him the demonstration which he asked, intimated that he would have had a greater blessing if he could have exercised a greater faith, saying, "(More) blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Let all of the Lord's people remember this, and **[R2620 : page 125]** instead of doubting the Lord's willingness to perform what he has promised, and requiring signs and further evidences and assurances, let us rather rest content that he who has so graciously done for us in the past more than we could have asked or thought is equally faithful today, and will fulfill to us all the good promises of his Word. The

more heartily we shall accept his promises, the more fully we shall trust to his gracious providences, the more peace of heart we shall have ourselves, and the more the Lord will delight himself in us as his servants and brethren, and the more he will be pleased to favor us and to use us.

Our Lord's remark, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," was a grand tribute of approval for the Gentile centurion. It distinctly indicates that the fact that the Lord's favor which for over eighteen hundred years had been confined to Israel was not merely because the Israelites were alone worthy, nor because in them alone was found such faith as that on account of which father Abraham was blessed, and the blessing pronounced on his children. But altho the Lord found greater faith in the centurion than amongst others in Israel, nevertheless he could not and did not invite the centurion to become one of his disciples, because "the gifts and callings of God are not things to be repented of," and the divine favor to Israelites must and did continue down to the full end of the "seventy weeks" of favor promised through Daniel the prophet – altho the national favor ceased three and a half years sooner, in the midst of the seventieth week, five days before our Lord's crucifixion, when he said of that nation, "Your house is left unto you desolate; ye shall see me no more until that day." – Matt. 23:38; Dan. 9:24.

It is certainly within the range of possibility that this centurion, whose good works and alms were so highly commended by the Jews, and whose faith was so highly spoken of by our Lord, might have been removed by Roman authority from Capernaum to Caesarea, another fortress, and that he may have been the centurion named Cornelius, the first Gentile accepted to the privileges and favors of the Gospel Church, at the expiration of the "seventy weeks" of favor confined to the Israelites. – Acts 10:1-35.

One lesson connected with this subject which should specially commend itself to any of the Lord's people who are masters or

employers is the lesson of kindness for servants. If a Gentile would be so careful for the interests of his servant, and thus bestir and trouble himself much to secure his release from pain, much more should every true Christian not only feel a kindness for those who are of the household of faith, but also be disposed to do good unto all men as they may have opportunity. We may be sure that all such evidences of interest in fellow-creatures, all such evidences of the spirit of love and kindness, are pleasing in the Lord's sight; and not only so, but that every time we exercise ourselves along such lines we deepen them and strengthen, confirm and establish character along the lines of love and mercy. This is one of the ways in which we are to develop ourselves more and more as copies of God's dear Son. – Rom. 8:29.
