

"BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS."

– LUKE 12:13-23. – SEPT. 16. –

"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" – Mark 8:36.

WHILE JESUS was preaching on spiritual themes he was interrupted by one of the audience, whose heart was filled with anxiety respecting temporal matters, esteeming that he was being wrongly dealt with by his brother in the division of the parental estate; and perhaps finding that through some technicality he could not obtain what he considered to be his just rights under Jewish laws, he appealed to the great Teacher to use his influence on his behalf – to speak to his brother – to tell his brother that he ought to deal generously, and perhaps to threaten him if he failed so to do.

How many there are who see just this much and no more in the teachings of Christ – a channel through which to serve their own interests; a means of securing justice to themselves. How many are ready to quote our Lord's precepts when it suits their convenience so to do, but who otherwise and at other times manifest little interest in them, and in the principles of righteousness which they inculcate! Persons in this attitude of heart are rarely able to grasp or enjoy the spiritual truths which our Lord enunciated, just as the young man in the lesson was failing utterly to profit by our Lord's spiritual teaching, because his entire thought was preoccupied with his own personal, selfish plans and schemes and views – however just they might have been.

Our Lord flatly refused to interfere in the manner suggested, saying, "Who made me a judge or an arbiter over you?" Thus he illustrated the general teaching of the Scriptures, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," and again, "If any man sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, refuse

not even if he take similarly thy cloak also" – do not ask or expect anything beyond what is granted by the civil laws of the land in which you live. "Be subject to the powers that be; for the powers that be are ordained [permitted] of God." Our Lord's Kingdom, long promised, and which eventually shall be "the desire of all nations," had not then come, and still has not been set up. We still pray, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." The Lord's people are to recognize this fact, and not to expect absolute righteousness and justice until present conditions cease, with the close of this dispensation, – of which the Scriptures tell us Satan is the prince or ruler. Instead of expecting justice in full measure now, the Lord's people should rather be surprised that there is so large a measure of justice obtainable in many parts of the world. **[R2653 : page 254]**

As our Lord was not willing to impose himself as a judge or an arbitrator in his day, so his followers now should not seek to interfere in secular affairs. The case would have been different had the two brothers come together to our Lord, and, indicating that they wished to do right, had requested his judgment of what would be the right course. In that event undoubtedly our Lord would have favored them with his view of the question and the reasons for it.

It would be an excellent thing for all of the Lord's footstep-followers to learn well this lesson of non-interference in secular matters – the lesson, that those who speak as the oracles of God should speak respecting spiritual matters, to the spiritual class and not to the worldly – to them that have ears to hear, and not to the blind and deaf. This, of course, would not mean that the Lord's people should not give any advice, but merely that they should not give advice nor otherwise interfere outside the laws, customs and usages of the country in which they reside. The young man in the narrative undoubtedly had appealed to his brother and to the Jewish authorities for the relief which he thought he ought to have; and similarly it is proper for a Christian to appeal to the person immediately interested for what he considers to be just rights in the matter in dispute. He may appeal also to the laws

of the land in which he resides; but if he fails in this he should content himself with his condition and wait patiently for the Lord's Kingdom and its righteous retribution.

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This principle, put into practice by Christian missionaries in China, would, we believe, have led to very different conditions than those which now obtain there. But our Lord's example and various injunctions along this line have been very generally ignored, and, to the contrary, it has been the custom of missionaries, who have gone to China and other lands, to ignore the laws of those lands and "the powers that be" there, which God's ordinance has permitted. They have attempted to settle all kinds of disputes; interfering in a manner which the Master, in this lesson, disapproved of. Not only so, but they have sought and invoked, publicly and privately, the interference of various so-called Christian governments of the world on their behalf, and in violation of the laws of "the powers that be" in those countries. It is as a result of this wrong line of conduct that the good of Christianity, its moral and civilizing influences, are specially hated and feared, – as political interferences, aimed at the destruction of the laws and institutions which to those people appear to be wise and good; and which undoubtedly are adapted to the present intellectual and moral conditions of the masses of their people.

We cannot too strongly condemn, as contrary to the Master's teachings, modern methods of missionary effort – backed by cannon, warships and soldiers. It seems to us wholly contrary to the method employed by our Lord and the apostles, and advocated by them. It is much more in harmony with the methods adopted during the dark ages, by Papacy, and by Mohammedanism. Early Protestant missions seem to us to have been along much more reasonable and proper lines. The missionary, in giving himself to that work, understood and agreed that, figuratively speaking, he took his life in his hands; he had already sacrificed his life before starting. Neither he nor those who sent him

forth thought of appealing to the government to avenge his death, either with many lives for the one life, or with large sums of money, nor with large concessions of land, or with large privileges of commerce. He went as a representative of the meek and lowly Jesus, as a "living sacrifice," as the apostles in early times went forth, without backing, ecclesiastical or civil. Like the apostles, they were privileged to appeal to all the laws and moral instincts of the people in whose midst they were living, and for whose good they were laying down their lives; but more than this they did not do, and were not authorized to do by anything in the Scriptures.

It is the present wrong system of compassing sea and land to make proselytes, with battleships, cannon and soldiers, that is responsible for the loss of thousands of lives and awful misery. Were the missionary question today left upon the same footing that it occupied in the days of the apostles, and again at the beginning of this century, it would probably be less pretentious in appearance, but in reality probably would have found just as many of the "elect" as the present method; and would have left undisturbed questions that already have caused much trouble, and which in the near future will cause more. It would have left millions of the poor heathen in a much more contented frame of mind than at present – would have left them much more susceptible to the influences of the true Gospel, when, by and by, the great missionary work which God has planned will begin in earnest, under the administration of the Kingdom of Heaven, with Christ and his elect Church, the kings and priests, to rule and bless with infinite power and wisdom and love.

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But while refusing to interfere with the matter, the Lord made use of the intrusion to point a lesson on the subject of covetousness – a lesson which would be of benefit to both of the brothers, if they were present, and a lesson, indeed, which could not fail to be of profit to all of his hearers. The exhortation to take heed of covetousness would

apply to the one who had sought our Lord's interference. Possibly he had been asking something outside of his rights and outside of his father's will and intent – coveting what his father had really intended should go to his brother. Or, if he were asking only what was reasonably his due, our Lord's words would be a consolation to him, as showing that whether or not he got all of his rights in the present life would be a comparatively unimportant matter – unimportant as compared to his having such experiences as would be favorable to his eternal life, and rightly using those experiences. Our Lord's words would also be a lesson to the other brother, if he were seeking to defraud and to take unjustly what belonged to his brother – or even if he were covetously ungenerous in construing his brother's rights. Indeed, everyone who will carefully [R2685 : page 255] consider the meaning of our Lord's parable in illustration of this subject of covetousness will draw from it a valuable, a profitable lesson.

THE RICH CHURL.

In this parable it is not stated that the rich man had obtained his wealth by any unlawful means. He is not charged with having defrauded his brother or his neighbor. The record merely is that he had temporal blessings in abundance, and that by natural increase he was very wealthy; and the point of the lesson turns upon his question to himself, What shall I do with these possessions?

The right attitude of mind, "the spirit of a sound mind," would have answered this question somewhat after this manner: These bounties of divine providence are a trust, and I am a steward, a trustee; my position will permit me to be a source of great blessing to others [R2686 : page 255] of my fellow-creatures not so bountifully supplied; in fact, I have in my hand the power to make many fellow-creatures comfortable and happy; and in discharging this stewardship in this proper manner I shall have much greater pleasure than if I endeavored selfishly to use all these bounties upon myself, or to store them up for my own use in the future.

Such an unselfish, generous course would not only have had divine approval, and thus have constituted "true riches" "laid up in heaven," but, additionally, it would have been the most direct road to happiness for the already favored individual himself. It is a true proverb, "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." So, many have found that hoarding of earthly wealth leads to poverty of heart, to a meanness of disposition, which is not enjoyed by the individual himself, and which is strongly reprobated by him with whom rests our eternal interests, our everlasting blessing and riches. On the contrary, he who uses, in harmony with his best judgment, the earthly wealth committed to his care, thereby purchases to himself a rich reward of approbation on the part of all with whom he has to do; and, through the Lord's gracious arrangement in Christ, this cultivation of the spirit of love becomes a most important factor in respect to his attainment of everlasting joy and blessing.

As illustrating the uncertainty of such selfish calculations, our Lord might have made the parable to close by showing the rich man as losing all of his possessions and being reduced to beggary through some misfortune, such as war or fire; or he might have shown him the victim of a loathsome disease, in which even his riches could not purchase attendance, so that thus he might suffer want in the midst of plenty. But he chose to close the parable by merely representing the rich man as dying suddenly – ceasing to have and to hold and greedily enjoy his selfish hoardings. "Soul, take thine ease," etc., is merely another way of saying – Self, take thine ease, eat, drink, etc.

Our Lord, to enforce the lesson, then raises the question, Whose, then, shall these things be? They could no longer be enjoyed by the accumulator, whoever might get them; he would be poor indeed, whoever might enjoy them; for these were all that he had; he had given up thought and effort and every talent to money-making and to attempted selfish enjoyments, and had not been rich toward God, – had not been rich in good works, – had not laid up treasure in heaven.

His life had been a failure; he would enter the next life a pauper, as respects mental and moral development in good qualities. He would enter it with a load of selfishness, with which to some extent he had been born, but to which he had added greatly by a life of selfishness. And his load of selfishness will, in that future life, for a time handicap his efforts toward true nobility, should he then make efforts toward perfection under the gracious terms of the Millennial Kingdom.

Tho our Lord in the parable represents the covetous person as succeeding in accumulating riches, yet, as a matter of fact, the majority of covetous people never so succeed; and their selfishness is not less reprehensible from the fact that it fails of success. The thought rather is that if a covetous person who succeeds makes a miserable failure of life, how much worse would be the failure of the covetous person who gains nothing, either in the present life or in that which is to come!

Our Lord, turning to his disciples at this juncture, gave a special lesson applicable to them only, and not to the multitude. Literally translated this message is: Be not *anxious* as respects your earthly life, its food and its clothing. Think rather of the life which is to come; remember that this present condition is, from the divine standpoint, a death condition. Consider that in you who believe, the new, the eternal life, has already begun, and that if you will faithfully continue under present conditions in living for this new life, and not after the flesh, it will be perfected in the First Resurrection. Think more of your bodies than of the raiment which covers them; think more of your life than of the natural food by which it is at present sustained. God is able and willing to give perfect life and perfect bodies and perfect conditions to those who believe in me, who walk in my footsteps and meet my approval. The reason why you need not take *anxious* thought for these temporal things, for which the world takes anxious thought (and necessarily so), is this: you have come into harmony with God, and have been adopted into his family; believing in me, you have been granted "liberty to become *sons of God.*" (John 1:12.) As sons of God, with the new life begun in you, you are to realize that everything of

the present life is quite unworthy to be compared with the future and eternal interests. You are to remember that, having consecrated yourselves to the Father's will in becoming my disciples, you have given up every interest and matter to his superior wisdom. Be content, therefore; be without anxiety, knowing that so long as you abide in me, and so long as you are walking in my footsteps, your Heavenly Father knoweth what things you have need of, even before you ask him, and is both able and willing to give what is best.

Therefore, if in divine providence you receive poverty as your unavoidable portion, accept it as best for you, according to divine wisdom; remembering that it is our Redeemer who is guarding our future and eternal interests, and permitting such experiences in this present life as will be most beneficial to us, and as will lead most directly to eternal riches and favors, and that in greatest measure.
