

[R3831 : page 246]

THE GREAT TEACHER'S TABLE-TALKS

– LUKE 14:1-14. – JULY 29. –

Golden Text: – "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

THE SABBATH was quite a feast day amongst the Jews, but in accordance with the requirements of the Law the dishes were served cold – cooked previously. Our Lord evidently made no objection to these Sabbath feasts, since we find that on several occasions he participated in them. The feast at Bethany just before his crucifixion was on the Sabbath, and likewise the one referred to in the present lesson. The invitation was from a prominent Pharisee, one of the rulers. It evidently included our Lord's disciples as well as himself, and numerous of the [R3831 : page 247] host's prominent friends, Pharisees and Doctors of the Law.

The fame of Jesus had spread considerably, and doubtless these men were interested in thus coming in close contact with him, with a view to judging according to their own standards respecting his character, teachings and miracles – whether or not he was a fanatic, whether or not he made great boasts of himself, why the common people seemed so attracted to him, and why he did not seem to specially seek the fellowship of the rich and influential – although, so far as we know, he never refused an invitation to a feast, always using such occasions as opportunities for the presentation of the truth, to glorify the Father in heaven, to help, to instruct, to benefit those with whom he was in contact.

The guests watched him critically rather than sympathetically. They were looking for faults rather than for virtues. But as with others, so with these – they found no fault in him. Perhaps by accident, perhaps by design, there was in the company a man who had the dropsy. He may have been a member

of the household or family; indeed our Lord possibly may have been invited there with a view to proposing the healing of this one with the infirmity.

Our Lord seems to have had a special feeling of sympathy with the afflicted, and he quickly noticed the man with the dropsy. The Pharisees were no doubt interested in witnessing the miracle, as any others would be; and at the same time, according to their forms, such a miracle on the Sabbath day would have been a misdemeanor. Our Lord's interest in handling the situation is apparent. He first inquired of his host and his learned associates whether or not it was lawful to heal the sick on the Sabbath day. The Doctors of the Law were expected to be able and willing to answer such questions propounded by the people at any time; yet in the presence of the great Teacher they all held their peace, made no reply; they wanted to see what course he would take. They did not wish to interrupt him – perhaps they wished to have an opportunity to find fault with him on this account. No objection to healing on the Sabbath day having been cited from the Law, our Lord performed the miracle – "He took him and healed him and let him go." The implication is that in some manner our Lord touched the afflicted one, that thus it might be the more manifest that the miracle was of divine power through him.

THEY WOULD ASSIST DUMB BRUTES

After having answered his own question by the miracle, thus attesting that nothing in the Law forbade the healing of the sick on the Sabbath, our Lord justified his course before the company saying, "Which of you having an ass or an ox fall into a pit would not draw him out on the Sabbath?" Another reading is, "Which of you having a son or even an ox fall into a pit would not on the Sabbath draw him out?" The proposition was unanswerable. They all knew that, where their selfish interests were involved, they

would decide that there was nothing in the Law to hinder lending assistance on the Sabbath. Thus our Lord clearly showed that their thought respecting the healing of humanity on the Sabbath was fallacious, unscriptural.

It will be remembered that our Lord was still under the terms of the Law Covenant, bound by every provision of the Law just as much as every other Jew had been from the time the Law was given at Mount Sinai. The Law Covenant did not pass away, as the Apostle points out, until Christ "nailed it to the cross." (Col. 2:14.) Hence nothing that our Lord did on the Sabbath day, healing the sick, etc., could properly be esteemed a violation of the fourth commandment, or any other feature of the Law.

We have already shown (DAWN STUDIES, Vol. VI., chap. VII.) that the Law Covenant sealed at Sinai was not in force before that time upon the Jews, that it was not given to any other people, and that so far as those who accepted Christ were and are concerned the Law Covenant ended at the cross. Hence all the obligations of the Jewish Sabbath ended there also. The followers of Jesus during this Gospel age keep the higher Sabbath, the antitypical Sabbath, the "rest of the people of God" – rest from their own works, rest from fear, rest in hope of the glorious things which God has provided through Jesus for all who love him, rest in hope also for the world, that in due time all shall come to a knowledge of the Lord. This perpetual rest of peace abides with us every day alike.

"NO LONGER SERVANTS, BUT SONS"

Our celebration of the first day of the week as a Christian Sabbath should not be with the thought that it is a law or bondage, but rather an appreciation of the great privilege we enjoy of leaving the ordinary affairs of life on that day to give special thought to the spiritual things of the New Creature and to fellowship one with another, commemorating the day also as the

one on which our Lord arose from the dead and began the work of the New Creation. We are looking forward also to the glorious rest that remaineth for the people of God, the eternity of blessed perfection into which we hope to be ushered by a resurrection from the dead, when we shall awake in our Lord's likeness. During this Gospel age our heavenly Father addresses us not as a house of servants but as a house of sons – as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. It would not be appropriate for him to give to these New Creatures, begotten of his Spirit, such laws as he gave to the Jews, the house of servants.

The Lord would not insult the New Creature by even suggesting the various things stipulated in the Ten Commandments. The New Creatures in Christ Jesus have no sympathy with profanity, idol worship, the unrest of disbelief, with dishonor to parents, with murder and adultery, false witness, covetousness. Those whose hearts run in these directions have not been begotten of the Spirit, have not the Spirit of Christ, are none of his. The Lord's command to those who are New Creatures in Christ Jesus is that, being begotten of the spirit of love, they shall grow in grace and in knowledge and in love, seeking daily to bring into subjection all the weaknesses of their mortal bodies, reckoned dead at the moment they were begotten of the Spirit. True, the apostles do urge upon the Lord's people to *put away anger and malice and envy and strife, etc.*, works of the flesh and of the devil; but even then they address the New Creature, not as though it were in sympathy with these wrong doings, but on the contrary, urging the New Creature to put away, to mortify, to put to death, these deeds of their flesh, already *reckoned dead*.

Our Father's dealings and commands are never to the [R3832 : page 248] flesh, but to the New Creatures. From this standpoint, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of Christ dwell in you." (Rom. 8:9.) Therefore, "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have

known Christ after the flesh, yet now, henceforth, know we him [so] no more." (2 Cor. 5:16.) We are "judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." (1 Pet. 4:6.) We are reckoned as fulfilling the highest demands of the divine law to God and to man, because we are not walking after the flesh but after the Spirit.

THE HUMBLE TO BE EXALTED

It was probably in answer to some question that our Lord propounded the parable of the guests bidden to a marriage feast, warning against the custom of seeking prominent positions, and the danger incurred that a more honorable person might come in later, and thus they might get the least honorable seat in the company. Our Lord noted this mark of selfishness in those who were gathered with him at the table of his host, but we must suppose that he did not rudely intrude the matter as a reproof at such a time without having a question or some reasonable cause for bringing the matter forward.

The entire lesson of the parable seems to be an illustration of the proper course amongst men as viewed from the divine standpoint, and hence an illustration to all of the way in which God will deal with those whom he invites to the antitypical marriage-feast. The chief places will not be given to those most bold, most inclined to usurp authority; but, on the contrary, the Lord will not forget the man or woman of humble mind who, thinking little of himself or herself, would thankfully and gratefully seek for and appreciate the very humblest place in the divine presence.

Ambition is a very necessary faculty of the human mind, without which the world would make comparatively little progress; but it is a very dangerous element as respects the formation of Christian character. We may be sure, from all the Scriptures set forth, that God's principle of dealing with us in the

distribution of the glories and honors of the Kingdom will be along the lines laid down by the Master: he that humbleth himself shall be exalted, he that exalteth himself shall be abased.

LOVE OF POWER TO DO GOOD

We are frequently charged by those who, from blindness or other reasons, would disparage the glorious Gospel of the Kingdom, that those "of this way" are seeking selfishly for the glory and honor and immortality of the Kingdom as something superior to what others will receive at the Lord's hand. This as a whole is an unfair and an unjust charge, for as far as we know the majority of those who are interested in "Present Truth" are not so much ambitious for the dignities of the Kingdom as they are for any place in that great marriage feast, any membership in the glorious Bride company, any opportunity to share with the heavenly Bridegroom in the great and wonderful work of blessing all the families of the earth. It would not occur to any of us to think of ourselves in connection with such high honors and dignities, glory and immortality, except as we find it plainly stated in the divine Word, but finding it there, it is the duty of faith to accept whatever we may be deemed worthy of, and to allow it to work in us to will and to do the Lord's good pleasure, as he intended.

The chief difficulty, so far as our experience goes, is not a mere ambition as respects glory, honor and rank in the Kingdom, but rather an ambition as respects the present life – a seeking who shall be greatest on this side the veil. Our observation is that some of the most talented, most able, most conscientious of the Lord's followers are in danger along this line, and it is a part of our duty to call this matter to the general attention, that each of the Lord's dear people may do all in his power to help any who are in such a position to see that an ambitious striving for glory and honor and dignity and position in the present time would surely mean a

loss of the Lord's favor and the ultimate attainment in the Kingdom of a much humbler position, if indeed pride did not hinder them entirely from being accepted as members of the "little flock." Let us remember the Apostle's exhortation, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." – 1 Pet. 5:6.

REMEMBER THE POOR AND THE FRIENDLESS

Perhaps it was in answer to some other question that our Lord gave his dissertation respecting the making of a feast and who should be invited to it, the conclusion of our lesson. He set forth a new proposition: The custom was to invite to a feast those whom you would expect and desire to ask you in return to a feast at their home. The thought of recompense was thus associated, a selfish thought. But our Lord's suggestion would not necessarily, we think, mean that it would be wrong to invite a person to a feast at our homes if we thought it at all probable he would ask us to his home. His thought rather is that, while this would be a pleasant and profitable interchange, there would be no merit in so doing in the Lord's sight – each would get his reward in such a reciprocity.

Perhaps the Lord wished to show his host that in inviting himself and his disciples, who were not so situated as to be able to invite the others of the company in turn to their homes, he had really done a gracious act, provided he had the gracious motive back of it. In making a feast for the poor, the helpless, the maimed and the blind, a work of charity and mercy would be done, and, no recompense coming in the present life, they might be sure of a blessing in the future life. In other words, our Lord intimates that every good deed willingly, intelligently done from the right motive, may be sure to have a blessing, as surely as will every evil deed, every injurious matter done with a wrong thought and

evil sentiment, be sure to have some kind of punishment either in the present or in the future life.

Our Lord declared that such a good deed will be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, but since he was not addressing his disciples, not addressing justified ones, we feel that his words should not be understood to mean that such a feast to the poor, etc., would secure the highest place in the First Resurrection among the blessed and holy who shall be kings and priests unto God and reign as the kingly class, the Bride class, with the Bridegroom. This would not be a reasonable view to put upon the words, because other Scriptures intimate that not only faith in Jesus [R3832 : page 249] as the Mediator is necessary, but a travelling faithfully in the narrow way in order to attain a share in the First Resurrection.

What then did our Lord mean? We answer that the First Resurrection, which will include only the "blessed and holy," the saints, the Bride of Christ, the Bride with the glorious Head and Bridegroom, will mark the beginning of the Kingdom which our Lord preached and which he taught us to pray for, saying, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven." Those who will have part in the First Resurrection are to be the kings and priests and judges of the world. (1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 20:6.) Surely after that First Resurrection the blessing of the world, the times of restitution of all things, will begin! Then the whole world will stand before these judges during the thousand years to be helped up, if they will, to the full of human perfection, or, failing to respond to their glorious opportunities, they will be destroyed in the Second Death.

In that day of their judgment every deed of kindness to the poor will be found to have wrought some blessing in the character of the individual which will have to do with his station, with his starting-point on the highway of holiness. The most degraded,

those who have accomplished nothing in the present time in the way of character development, must begin at the very start of the road and have the longer journey to its farther end of perfection; while those who in the present time have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and have sought to comfort and benefit their fellows, especially those who would give even a cup of cold water to a disciple of the Lord because he was his disciple – all such would be found to be benefited proportionately in that day of glorious possibilities. Thus the Lord's words would signify that any who would give a cup of cold water or who would bless the maimed and the blind and the poor would experience a reward and blessing in that future time which would follow the resurrection of the just – in the Millennial age.

VALUE OF TABLE TALKS

The example set by our Lord in the matter of table-talks we have followed for many years at the Bible House with great profit. We find that much advantage accrues from the observance of order and regularity. Every morning promptly at 7 o'clock we have praise and prayer (Sunday 8 A.M.). Then we gather at the table, and after giving thanks for the food and praying that a blessing may be derived from our fellowship together, one of our number reads the text for the day from the Heavenly Manna. Questions are called for as breakfast proceeds and the text is thoroughly discussed. Later, before leaving the table, the comment following the text in the Manna is read as a conclusion of the lesson. Our dinner and supper-table talks are upon whatever questions may suggest themselves to any of those present, with opportunities for general expression – **[R3833 : page 249]** the brethren being asked for an expression, then the opportunity thrown open to anybody. The one occupying the head of the table is expected to give the final answer to the question. These table-talks are a schooling of themselves, ranging as they do on all parts of the Word of God, and refresh the

memories of those present respecting what they have previously learned. We commend this method to all the dear people of God. Food partaken of under such circumstances seems to do one more good than otherwise, and the spiritual refreshment is almost certain to be advantageous. We do not favor disputings or replies of one to another, but merely the statement by each one of them of his own understanding of the question or the Scripture involved. Our minds cannot help being active, and it is profitable to us to have them directed into useful channels. Anyway, the example set by our Lord is surely a good one.
