

PROFITABLE TABLE TALKS

– APRIL 5. – LUKE 14:7-24. –

"Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." – Verse 11.

A CONSIDERABLE number of advanced Christian people, Bible students, have in an informal way recently adopted the custom of having Bible talks during the meal hour. We know of many who are finding it profitable. To partake of Heavenly food at the same time that we appropriate the natural is quite proper; the lifting of the mind from the things of the world to the consideration of Heavenly things is advantageous in every way. We see that this was Jesus' custom.

Today's lesson shows the Master a guest at the table of a prominent Pharisee, speaking in a manner that would not be appropriate to any but Himself. In a parable He criticised the gathering guests, because He noted that they selfishly chose the chief seats of honor, and because He would have them see that this selfish spirit would have to do with their character-building and with their fitness or unfitness for the honors of the Kingdom for which they hoped.

When bidden to a public function, they should humbly take very lowly, inconspicuous places, not knowing how many might be more worthy than they in the estimation of the host. Then, if the host noticed them in a very humble place, and so desired, he might ask them forward to a more prominent place. Thus they would be honored and the honor would reach them in a proper manner; whereas, in taking a prominent place uninvited, they at least ran the risk of displeasing the host or the possibility of being asked to take an inferior place, the more honorable one being given to one

considered more worthy; and thus they would be, in a measure, disgraced. [R5414 : page 73]

The Master declared that this principle held with Him and with the Father; namely, that "whosoever exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The Apostles set forth the same proposition, saying, "God resisteth the proud, but showeth His favor to the humble"; "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." – James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:6.

The thought is that the self-seeking, the proud in spirit, could not be trusted by the Lord in a high position. They might do damage to themselves and to His cause, with such a spirit. On the contrary, He will seek those who are of humble mind and who would not be injured by the exaltation, nor in danger of deflecting in the future work to which all of the Kingdom class are called.

Turning to His host, Jesus gave him something of a compliment, saying, "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they bid thee again, and recompense be made thee. But call the poor, the [R5415 : page 73] maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just."

The Pharisee had done something of the very kind in inviting Jesus and probably His disciples to dinner. He well knew that they were poor and would be unable to ask him in return. The Master's words may have been comforting to him. At all events, they set forth a grand principle, which should be recognized by all, rich and poor alike. If we get our rewards for good deeds in the present life, how will there be anything coming to us in the future?

Let us therefore follow the Master's instruction and seek to do kindnesses to those who cannot return the favor, assured that God

will appreciate such things as done for mercy's sake, for righteousness' sake, and will give a proper reward. We do not understand the Master to mean that it would be wrong to invite friends or neighbors or kinsman who might invite us in turn, but that we are not to think that in so doing we are laying up any treasure in Heaven.

There was more reason for the calling of the poor, the lame, the maimed, in Jesus' day than now. Today, by common consent, civilized people recognize a duty toward the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. Homes are provided for them out of the public purse, by general taxation. Whoever enters into this matter of paying for the support of the poor in a proper spirit is doing something that in the sight of God is meritorious; but whoever pays such taxes from compulsion merely, without appreciation, evidently would not be deserving of any credit. However, all such institutions should be conducted in such a manner as would afford reasonable comfort and be good enough for ourselves or for our relatives, were we or they the persons in need.

Under such conditions it would be almost wrong to fail to cooperate with these provisions, to refuse such provisions and to expect private support from friends and relatives, at an additional cost over and above the taxes they pay. Everything in God's Word seems to inculcate the spirit of justice first, and the spirit of love, kindness and sympathy beyond justice. But it should be voluntary and not enforced, and an indication of the measure of the Holy Spirit which we possess.

GOD'S GREAT FEAST

A person at the supper, after hearing Jesus' comments, remarked that it would be a blessed thing to have a share in the great Feast with which the Kingdom of God will be inaugurated. Jesus seized upon this as a text, and preached another sermon in a

parable. As usual, His parable-sermon was in respect to the Kingdom of God:

A man made a great supper and bade many guests. When the time for the supper arrived, he sent his servants to inform them, saying, "Come; for all things are now ready." But these with one accord began to make excuse. One said, I have bought a field; I must go and take a look at it; please excuse me. Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must be proving them; please excuse me. Another said, I have recently married; therefore I cannot come. When the servant returned and told his experience the Master of the house was provoked, and said to the servant, Go out quickly into the streets and the lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame.

The meaning of the parable is not far to seek. God had indeed provided a great Feast. Long years before He had sent word to the Jewish nation that in due time such a great blessing would be open to them – the privilege of becoming members of the Kingdom of God – sharers of it with Messiah. Yet, when Jesus appeared and the time came for the feast to be spread, those who had been bidden were careless.

Jesus and His disciples had been going about for some time declaring that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and that all who believed should make haste to associate themselves with it – to come to the Feast – should be getting a part of the blessing. But the invited ones were full, covetous, money-lovers. When they heard the Message of the Kingdom they said, I am too busy with my worldly prospects. And so they slighted God's invitation, extended to them through Jesus and the Apostles.

The ones especially invited were the ones who specifically claimed to be the "holiness people" – the Pharisees and the Doctors of the Law. In the parable, the rejection of the ones originally invited led to the invitation's being sent to others, in the streets and

the lanes of the city. This meant that the poor had the Gospel preached to them. Publicans and sinners were received by our Lord, told about the Kingdom, and invited to leave all their sinful and injurious practises, to accept forgiveness of sins, and to come in and participate as heirs of God's promise of joint-heirship with Jesus Christ their Redeemer.

Nearly all the preaching of Jesus and of His disciples, up to Pentecost and after, was to the poor of Israel – the publicans and sinners. The charge made against our Lord by the Pharisees who rejected Him was that He received sinners, and that He ate with them.

GREAT FEAST REPRESENTS RICH BLESSINGS

The great Feast of the parable figuratively represents rich blessings of God's providence for the Church – the knowledge of the Truth, justification from sin, the begetting of the Holy Spirit, the privilege of appropriating the exceeding great and precious promises of God's Word. All this is the Feast which the Lord has spread for now eighteen hundred years, and to which He has been inviting, or calling, certain ones. First the Pharisees, the "religious lights," representatives of Moses, and secondly the poor, the sinful, the weak, the outcasts of Israel, the Prodigal Son class, were invited.

Some of the latter class came, but not enough to fill the places already provided. In other words, not enough of the Jews were "Israelites indeed," acceptable to God, to fill the foreordained number of the elect Church. Hence the Master sent out His servants the third time, saying **[R5415 : page 74]** that they should go outside the city, into the highways and hedges, and urge the people to come in, that His House might be filled – not a seat left vacant.

This applies, evidently, to the sending of the Gospel to the Gentiles. For eighteen hundred years the Message has been going

up and down through the highways and hedges, calling and inviting, drawing, such as have hearing ears and responsive hearts. In all, they will not be a great company. In all, they will not represent very many of the Lights of the world. The Apostle writes, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble," hath God chosen, but chiefly "the poor of this world, rich in faith," to be heirs of the Kingdom. – 1 Corinthians 1:26,27; James 2:5.

Ultimately the full number purposed by the great Householder will have been called, accepted, and found worthy through Christ to have a place at that table – to share in that great Feast. It will be the Nuptial Feast, in honor of the marriage of the Lamb, after His wife hath made herself ready. (Revelation 19:7-9.) At that feast, we are assured, will be a secondary company, not worthy to be of the Bride class. These may be figuratively styled the bridesmaids, the Great Company class; for after the account of the gathering of the Bride we have the Lord's message to these subsequently delivered from Babylon, saying, "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

You can imagine the honors and joys of that great banquet! The aroma of the good things coming, already reaches us in the anteroom, before we enter the banquet hall. These odors come to us through the exceeding great and precious promises of God's Word, assuring us of His faithfulness and of His provision of the things which "eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man," but which "God hath provided for them that love Him" supremely.

Those originally bidden will not taste of that supper, though, thank God! Divine provision has arranged for another banquet, which through the Kingdom will be spread for all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples – "a feast of fat things." – Isa. 25:6-8.

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