

Cast the Unprofitable Servant into Outer Darkness

Who are these virgins who have lived at ease? Is it possible we could be singing about ourselves? Jesus said in connection particularly with this occasion, of an application to all our lives, “Let a man examine himself.” He spoke this through the words of Paul, and continued, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.”

The title of the exhortation this morning is taken from the 25th chapter of Matthew, Matthew 25:30—the termination of the parable of the unprofitable servant—the man who hid his lord’s talents in the earth—“And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” These are very serious words, and many will come into this class. We are told many are called, but only few are chosen. In all probability some here will hear these words. None of us wish that it should be so, but we must face the facts.

What is it to be unprofitable? How do we tell? There is only one way—by examining ourselves in the light of the Word and honestly facing what we find. Unprofitable means unproductive—not doing the work of the Master, not doing it to the extent required, pleasing ourselves, engaged in our own business, our own welfare, our own advantage. How do we use our vacation? How do we use all our spare time? Do we go fishing, or seeking pleasure? Or, do we visit the sick, and the needy, and the lonely, or proclaim the Truth, or help in the work of the Truth in other ways? How do we spend our leisure—watching television? It’s a tragedy that that word need even be mentioned among the sanctified people of God.

There are many instructions by which we can examine ourselves. Jesus said, “When ye shall have done all that is commanded, say, We are unprofitable servants.” Even, at best, there is no margin—the fullest effort is not too much. Anything less is not enough. There is no place to stop and relax. God demands the best, the fullest, the extremest, the very limit. The regulations of the Law of Moses speak of this. The sacrifices had to be the best they had—the choicest, the first, the unblemished. Only this kind of service manifests the true realization and appreciation of God’s greatness and goodness. And that is why only this kind of service pleases Him. Anything less dishonors Him—cheapens the way of salvation. There is infinitely more involved in living the Truth and serving God acceptably than most who bear the name of Christadelphian realize. To aspire too little realization of what the Truth really calls for in devotion, labor, and effort, there will be much unnecessary weeping and gnashing of teeth. All could so easily be avoided, for the way is open to all, but we must follow that way.

It is not a question of how much we do for the Truth, or how much time we spend for the Truth. If the whole life is not dedicated to one purpose, then nothing we do is of any avail—no matter how much it is, for God demands all—a living sacrifice, a total offering, all thy heart, all thy strength, all thy mind. Part—no matter how large a part, no matter how satisfying to us—is not acceptable to God. For even the whole, we are still unprofitable servants. When we have done all, when we have done the very most, we are taught to say, “We are unprofitable servants.” We should still have a sense of not doing enough—of fervent desire to do more, even after we have done our best.

As we study the scriptural testimonies on this subject, certain basic principles emerge clearly and strikingly. First, the one to which we have called attention—unless we give all, nothing is acceptable.

Secondly, the words that are used to describe the condition in which we stand before God—our relationship to Him. This is somewhat obscured in our version, but if we look into it, we shall find that the word servant, which Paul uses so often of himself and Christ of his followers, means slave—bondservant, a complete purchase and possession and ownership. It is a word used in a bad sense, an undesirable sense, but the Spirit uses it of our responsibility before God.

And third, a kindred thought—stewardship. We are spoken of as stewards—all that we possess, we are told, we merely hold for the use of God, and every item of it will have to be accounted for—just how we use it—when the stewards are called to account.

Fourth, the aspect of willingness. It must be with the heart, in love and in gratitude, eager freewill and desire. If there is any reluctance, any sense of burden, any holding back, we destroy the value of our service to God. It is not what we should do; it is what we should desire to do.

Fifth, our whole life must be a consistent unity—always in harmony, always in contact with God, everything radiating from one center. Even the world, in its ignorance, realizes the importance of this principle—of the destructiveness of conflict of a divided mind—the source of most of the world’s mental ills. James tells us clearly the double-minded man can expect nothing from God—the man of two interests is unstable. This is possibly the deepest and most powerful aspect of the subject—the essential frame of mind that is required.

Sixth, that no man lives unto himself. We do not tread the way to the Kingdom alone. We have a mutual responsibility, far more searching than we are apt to realize. We are part of a large family; we are not single individuals.

That condition ceases entirely at baptism. None are ever free from this responsibility. Whenever there is any need, the obligation falls upon all to fill it. To be part of the family of God brings great blessings, great privileges, and great responsibilities. When we join that family, we assume responsibility for every member of that family, to the fullest limits of our opportunity and ability. And we shall be held responsible for every member of the family, to the extent that we are able to help or influence them. “No man liveth to himself.”

The seventh principle: That Christ and Paul are given as examples for us to follow—examples of what God requires, not something far off that we should sit back and relax, thanking God that He has done it all and provided a way of salvation that does not interfere with our comfortable pleasures. We must follow them. “If any man is worthy of me, let him take up his cross, and follow me.” We must pattern ourselves after the example given; otherwise, we miss the whole point of their teachings.

We teach so much that Christ is a representative and not a substitute. We make much of this in presenting the Truth to the alien. Do we realize what it means to ourselves? If we will give full weight to the many solemn passages which describe what God expects—what He expects as a reasonable service of true love and gratitude, we should be helped to realize the magnitude of the change of life that is necessary to gain God’s infinite blessing of eternal life.

Let us not make the fatal mistake of cutting these passages down to fit our own petty preconceived conceptions, measuring our little selves by someone else’s little self. Let us open our minds to accept their full teaching and try to adjust our limited intellect to their magnitude. “Many are called, but few are chosen,” because few ever realize the magnitude of the call. The truth of God is not for those who desire only to go partway.

Matthew 25:30 – “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.” The verses that immediately follow begin to illustrate what he means, speaking of the time when the Son of Man comes to divide the sheep from the goats, separating them on the right hand and on the left. “Then shall he say also the them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?” Now the significance lies in the next verse. Doubtless, they had done much of this kind of thing, but did they go far enough? “Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.” Do we get the point? It was not that they hadn’t done it, but that they hadn’t done it to the fullest extent. “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.” They had doubtless done enough to satisfy themselves, but they hadn’t realized the point.

In the previous chapter, Matt 24:45 – “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season.” This appears to refer to one individual, whom he has made ruler over his household. But we clearly see that it is not just referring to one individual. The lesson applies to all—all have this same responsibility, as we shall see from his further words. The significance here is in the word wise. Who is the wise servant? None of us like to think of ourselves as foolish, as stupid. But what else are we, if we neglect anything that will gain us life?

In the 13th chapter of Mark, we see the point illustrated that these words apply to all—the early emphasis is on the universality of the command. Mark 13:34 – “The Son of Man...gave to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.” The significant word here is every. Everyone is expected to work in the Master’s absence. There are no exceptions—no idle servants. Do we think perhaps that the work of the Truth is someone else’s responsibility? Do we speak about lack of ability, lack of opportunity, lack of time, lack of anything? The unprofitable servant in the parable with which we began was the one that was only given one talent. Comparing himself with those who were given ten, perhaps he thought that his little bit would not be missed. Did he know his end? There is plenty that anyone can do. And the hands will find the work, if the heart truly desires it.

In the 16th chapter of Luke there is a very important parable, perhaps the most pressing of all Christ’s parables. It appears that the Pharisees at least found it so. Luke 16:9-13 – “And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” What does he mean? What is the mammon of righteousness? How do we make friends that will serve us in the great day of account? The mammon of unrighteousness is this world’s goods, and they must be put to God’s use to serve this purpose.

Verse 10, searching a little deeper, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” No matter how little it is, the principle applies. We remember the widow’s mite and the abundance of the rich man, which meant nothing. But do we get the point that he is inferring—faithful about what?

Verses 11-13 – “If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?” Certainly a reasonable question. If what God has given us, we do not use as we are told, why should He give us any more? Why should we squander what He gives us now, and expect Him to give us eternal life? “And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?” That is the point. If you have not been faithful in that which is another’s—it is not ours at all. We have no right to say how it should be used. “No servant can serve two masters.”

John 4:34 – “Jesus saith unto them, (We remember the occasion.) My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” Sometimes a vivid symbol will give us much more grounds for meditation than many words of exhortation. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.” What is your meat? Pleasure? Satisfying yourself? Relaxation? Or many of the other things that flesh desires? Or do you have the desire to serve God? Is the desire to serve God, as a hunger craving to be filled? “My meat, says Jesus, is to do the will of him that sent me.”

We find the example of the Apostle Paul in Acts 20:34-35. “Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.” Paul was chosen to almost single-handedly present the gospel to the Gentiles, and yet he worked with his own hands, not only to support himself, but to support others also. It would appear he overdid it, that he could have used his time better in teaching the Truth, exclusively. But that was not the principle. “Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye are to support the weak.”

Paul felt that his teaching was not just in words, but in deed, in example. This sense of responsibility for one another should permeate all our lives. “No man can live to himself”—not even Paul, the great teacher to the Gentiles.

If we fail in the least of our responsibilities to the least of Christ’s brethren, we fail in our responsibility to Christ. There can be no selfish, self-centered considering of our own profit and welfare. Here is the essential spirit of that wonderful condition in the early church, when no one said that the things that he possessed were his own. There can be no selfish individuality. We are all part of an essential unity—part of a much larger whole. If one suffers, all must suffer with him.

Who is weak? Who is the weak? Any, who are in need of help of any kind. As Paul said, “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?” Here was the example. There is no end—no measure, no limits to our responsibilities in the Truth. No relaxation. Jesus said, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” The sabbath—the rest—is for the future. There is no limit, except the fullest extent of our opportunities.

The 12th chapter of Romans, verse 1 – “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Your reasonable service—here is a strange and beautiful figure—a living sacrifice. What does it mean to us? Do we feel that our lives are in harmony with these words of the Apostle? These things which he says are just what is reasonably expected of us. He does not consider he is asking too much—he is being extreme in laying down this requirement of love. He knows that any, who truly value the gift of God, will consider this the very least that they can do to show their affection for Him. Any who do not feel this way simply do not understand the Truth at all.

I Corinthians 15:58 – “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Therefore, tying it in with the glorious picture he has presented of when the mortal shall put on immortality, when death shall be swallowed up in victory. “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Therefore, by beloved brethren...always abounding.” All through scripture, these key thoughts are prominent—always and abounding.

Always—continually, exclusively, consistently, dependably. No ups and downs. No hit and miss. No alternations of enthusiasm and forgetfulness. But always—day in and day out, in season and out of season, abounding, over-abundance, pressed down and running over, as we hope to receive. Always anxious to do more, no measuring, no restricting, no self-satisfaction, sending and being sent to limits that nature permits. This and this alone is the hearty robust service that the Lord says that He loves. If we correspond with it as we examine ourselves, let us rejoice. If we do not, let us ponder well just how deeply we’ve reached God’s eternal salvation.

Galatians 6:9-10 – “As we have therefore opportunity—as we have opportunity, that is the measure—let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” And verse 2, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” To bear one another’s burdens is the law of Christ. We must each examine ourselves to see to what extent we are fulfilling that law. In verse 5 he says, “For every man shall bear his own burden”—warning us of our own position and not to take advantage of the help of others unnecessarily. Incidentally, this is a different word for burden. The one here is for a normal load. The

burden in verse 2 means that which is difficult to bear. These are two entirely different words in the original, where we lose the distinction in our translation.

The law of Christ makes it very easy to be imposed upon, very easy to be made a fool of, but we cannot loose in the ultimate sense. The ultimate, says Paul, who are the real Jews. Far better to be imposed upon, to be taken advantage of a thousand times than to run the risk of hearing Christ say, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to the least of one of these."

The 3rd chapter of Colossians, verse 23 – "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men." If we had any conception of what makes life really enjoyable, it shouldn't be necessary for us to be told this. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily." What point is there in anything else? Here is the secret of bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Every thought—here is the secret of that unity of mind, and of life, and of purpose. Whatever we are doing, be it the commonest task, it must be done to the conscious view to the service of God. If it is any part at all of our life's pattern, then it must be done as unto God. To maintain that basic single-mindedness, that basic harmony which is necessary, then it must be done the very best we can with a view to pleasing God.

I Thessalonians 2:9 – "For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you." Was it pride? "Because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." Preaching by day and labouring by night. Why? What was his motive? The previous verse tells us, verse 8, "Because ye were dear unto us." The example of Paul is always beautiful in its tenderness. He desired to show the fullness of his affection. Preaching the gospel was not enough. He desired to do everything possible. It never seemed enough to fully demonstrate his love. And this is the only acceptable spirit. They that sow sparingly shall reap sparingly. And reaping sparingly is not a description of receiving eternal life.

The 2nd epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter 3, verse 8 – "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you, not because we have not power (or authority), but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us." Whenever we read of what Christ told to Paul, we must remember it is as an example; otherwise we completely miss the power of their teaching.

Paul's 1st letter to Timothy, chapter 5, verse 6 – "But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." He happens to be speaking of women, or widows, but we know, of course, that the principle applies just as much to men. She, or he, that lives in pleasure is dead while they live. Pleasing self—seeking pleasure—is spiritual death—a foolish, meaningless living death, a stupid empty animal existence. Pleasing God, serving God, and working in God's eternal purpose—that is life, a glorious, satisfying, purposeful relation to divinity.

The words of John in his 1st epistle, chapter 3, verse 16 – "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." What does he mean? "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Here is one passage to really test ourselves by—to examine ourselves, to judge ourselves that we be not judged. He does not say that we should be ready to lay down our lives. He is not speaking of some rare emergency, some spectacular heroic sacrifice, but a simple basic way of life. "We ought to lay down our life for the brethren." The next verse makes it clear what he is driving at. "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwellest the love of God in him?" That is the laying down of the life for the brethren—devoting it to their service and welfare. The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life—his whole life, not just his death—his whole life for many.

Let us get the full meaning of his words recorded in Luke 9:23-24. "And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it." Shall we be among the few, who through realizing the full power and significance of these words—to deny themselves, to lose their life, to take up their cross. Shall we be among the few who find the narrow, yet glorious, way of life? Or, shall we be among the many who hear those terrible words, "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."

Bro G.V.Growcott