

"The king hath commanded me a business."

- I Samuel xxi,2

I Samuel xxi,1-9

Luke xix,12-27

Psalm 143

New Book of Worship, Psalm 8, pp.43,44

Every man and every woman is a merchant. This fact the Scriptures use to inform us of the true nature of our life here. There is the parable of the talents and the command to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

If in our external life our business continues to show losses, failure will inevitably result. The business of life is both natural and spiritual. We have spiritual possessions as well as natural. All our gains and losses, all our spiritual as well as our natural possessions are made by an exchange.

We need capital to commence business, and we recall that in the parable of the talents <sup>in Matthew</sup> it is written, "For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey." In these terms are laid down the conditions on which spiritual prosperity depends. The kingdom of heaven is compared to a man traveling into a far country, who called his servants and delivered unto them his goods.

Two important truths are taught in both parables of the talents: first, that all things we possess, by the use of which we may attain eternal happiness, are a free gift to us from the Lord alone, and that if we make proper use of them, they are finally given to us as our own and are never taken from us; and second, that while we live in this world, we are left so much to ourselves that according to all appearance we are our own masters, independent of Him from whom all that we have is derived.

Of the Divine presence we have no sensible perception, so that if we were to judge by outward testimony, as made manifest through the bodily senses or even as suggested by our consciousness, without the testimony of revelation as given in the Word or without the dictates of our own enlightened reason, we might fall in doubt even of the existence of a God, as some actually do. Thus the Lord is depicted as traveling into a far country.

Life in and for this natural world is life in a country far removed from life in the close presence of the Lord. We are born natural and into natural surroundings. The state of life here even at its best and in its greatest beauty is far removed from the glory and beauty of life in heaven. Or to put it in other words, if we live only in the natural plane of our minds, we are in a state of life far removed from the happiness that is possible to us even while we are here.

The talents that the Lord gives us are the knowledge of our duty and the faculty of doing it. Our duty is to learn and do the Lord's will. We trade with the Lord's talents when we employ His principles in doing our daily work. Those servants who prospered increased their talents. When what we learn to be right is reproduced in the life and not held imprisoned in the memory, the talent is increased.

The Lord when on earth revealed to us the way of life and then went away. He ascended up where He was before, into a state of life far removed from conditions here on earth. And He went away that He might receive the unforced homage of men. He went away in person that He might come in the power and glory of the spirit.

There are many respects in which it is best for us that this is so. It is necessary that we be left in freedom. It is better to make some mistakes and to have an occasional fall than never to learn to walk. The Lord goes away from our outward senses and allows us to wander apparently unaided, to fall, to waste our living. But though unseen to us He still keeps near us. His love is ever over us. The almighty arms are always underneath us, ever ready to help when we recognize our need of His help. So He gives us our talents and says, "Trade with them till I come," and goes away.

Let us observe that the talents are not our own. They are a gift, committed to us to use. If we make proper use of them, they will increase, yet the increase is due to Him also. If we let them lie idle, if we misappropriate them, or use them foolishly or divert them to selfish aims, they are wasted or lost. The Lord does not want us to lose them. He says, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." The Lord is not sparing of His favors. He wishes to supply us with everything that will contribute to our happiness - to give to us all the riches of His love and wisdom. And the more we will take the better will we please Him. But He desires that we possess the real riches and the substantial joys, not the mere shadow of them. He loves us too much to see us laboring and adorning ourselves with tinsel and painfully accumulating treasures that will vanish in a moment.

We cannot measure the value of our talents in terms of material things. Try it. Try silver, gold, lands, worlds. What would you exchange for the capacity to know and to love? Is not the merchandise of these capacities better than the merchandise of silver, or even of fine gold? The soul can extract every excellence from all outward things and yet find them of little value.

Whatever our external state, we need not be poor. Our Heavenly Father has endowed us with capital enough to satisfy our highest ambitions, and He wishes us to make the best possible use of it. And this is the paradox of spiritual commerce. What we keep we lose, what we use we save, and what we give we retain. Influx is according to efflux. The more we use the more we have. This is a universal law. We never get even the most trivial thing to keep without some effort, without giving some equivalent.

The point to be noted is the certainty of success when we use the faculties which the Lord has given us for the upbuilding of His kingdom in ourselves and in the world. Everyone is rewarded according to his work. It does not always seem so to us because we see only a fraction of the results of any act. But it is so. Those who act from love to the Lord and to the neighbor never fail of receiving their reward. The Lord does not ask anything for Himself except for the sake of His children.

There is a life within our natural life, and our external occupations bring us in touch with the world, affording us the opportunity of serving mankind and the Lord. We invest our life in the business which we select. The spiritual value of our employment will be measured by the degree and quality of the love which we put into it. We can serve the Lord and the neighbor in every useful work that we do. Every man and woman may say, "I will do my work well; it shall be true and good work according to the best of my ability. I will do good work because I love the Lord and mankind.

When these motives are adopted, the door is opened to the Lord and power flows in from Him. This is the process by which the mind grows and our spiritual nature is developed. It is done **through** our natural occupations. Here our motives and purposes are weighed in the balances, and according to our deeds we are paid. We grow rich in spiritual knowledge, strong in spiritual power, and we gain enlarged dominion over the cities of the soul.

In this business there need be no failure. No rise or fall of external values can touch it. No failure of others can endanger it. Thieves cannot break through and steal. Our natural enterprises may fail, but our love to the Lord and the neighbor, our spiritual riches, remain safe.

Our faculties are given us for use in the service of others. We are to use them for others as they are to use theirs for us. All our faculties are given us in trust, and as we use them for the benefit of others, we become rich in happiness. For in this way we build up the Lord's kingdom within us, and He enriches us with the treasures of eternal life.

"And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know anything of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place.

"Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present.

"And the priest answered David and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread."