

Vol.. 22 – Gain that is Loss

Christ was teaching, and, as usual, others besides His disciples had gathered about Him. He had been speaking to the disciples of the scenes in which they were soon to act a part. They were to publish abroad the truths He had committed to them, and they would be brought in conflict with the rulers of this world. For His sake they would be called into courts, and before magistrates and kings. He had assured them of wisdom which none could gainsay. His own words, that moved the hearts of the multitude, and brought to confusion His wily adversaries, witnessed to the power of that indwelling Spirit which He had promised to His followers.

But there were many who desired the grace of heaven only to serve their selfish purposes. They recognized the marvelous power of Christ in setting forth the truth in a clear light. They heard the promise to His followers of wisdom to speak before rulers and magistrates. Would He not lend His power for their worldly benefit?

“And one of the company said to Him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.” Through Moses, God had given directions concerning the transmission of property. The eldest son received a double portion of the father's estate (Deuteronomy 21:17), while the younger brothers were to share alike. This man thinks that his brother has defrauded him of his inheritance. His own efforts have failed to secure what he regards as his due, but if Christ will interpose the end will surely be gained. He has heard Christ's stirring appeals, and His solemn denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees. If words of such command could be spoken to this brother, he would not dare to refuse the aggrieved man his portion.

In the midst of the solemn instruction that Christ had given, this man had revealed his selfish disposition. He could appreciate that ability of the LORD which might work for the advancement of his own temporal affairs; but spiritual truths had taken no hold on his mind and heart. The gaining of the inheritance was his absorbing theme. Jesus, the King of glory, who was rich, yet for our sake became poor, was opening to him the treasures of divine love. The Holy Spirit was pleading with him to become an heir of the inheritance that is “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away.” 1 Peter 1:4. He had seen evidence of the power of Christ. Now the opportunity was his to speak to the great Teacher, to express the desire uppermost in his heart. But like the man with the muck rake in Bunyan's allegory, his eyes were fixed on the earth. He saw not the crown above his head. Like Simon Magus, he valued the gift of God as a means of worldly gain.

The Saviour's mission on earth was fast drawing to a close. Only a few months remained for Him to complete what He had come to do, in establishing the kingdom of His grace. Yet human greed would have turned Him from His work to take up the dispute over a piece of land. But Jesus was not to be diverted from His mission. His answer was, "Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you?"

Jesus could have told this man just what was right. He knew the right in the case; but the brothers were in a quarrel because both were covetous. Christ virtually said, It is not My work to settle controversies of this kind. He came for another purpose, to preach the gospel, and thus to arouse men to a sense of eternal realities.

In Christ's treatment of this case is a lesson for all who minister in His name. When He sent forth the twelve, He said, "As you go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely you have received, freely give." Matthew 10:7, 8. They were not to settle the temporal affairs of the people. Their work was to persuade men to be reconciled to God. In this work lay their power to bless humanity. The only remedy for the sins and sorrows of men is Christ. The gospel of His grace alone can cure the evils that curse society. The injustice of the rich toward the poor, the hatred of the poor toward the rich, alike have their root in selfishness, and this can be eradicated only through submission to Christ. He alone, for the selfish heart of sin, gives the new heart of love. Let the servants of Christ preach the gospel with the Spirit sent down from heaven, and work as He did for the benefit of men. Then such results will be manifest in the blessing and uplifting of mankind as are wholly impossible of accomplishment by human power.

Our LORD struck at the root of the affair that troubled this questioner, and of all similar disputes, saying, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.

"And He spoke a parable to them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry. But God said to him, You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you: then whose shall these things be, which you have provided? So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

By the parable of the foolish rich man, Christ showed the folly of those who make the world their all. This man had received everything from God. The sun had been permitted to shine upon his land; for its rays fall on the just and on the unjust. The showers of heaven descend on the evil and on the good. The LORD had caused vegetation to flourish, and the fields to bring forth abundantly. The rich man was in perplexity as to what he should do with his produce. His barns were full to overflowing, and he had no place to put the surplus of his harvest. He did not think of God, from whom all his mercies had come. He did not realize that God had made him a steward of His goods that he might help the needy. He had a blessed opportunity of being God's almoner, but he thought only of ministering to his own comfort.

The situation of the poor, the orphan, the widow, the suffering, the afflicted, was brought to this rich man's attention; there were many places in which to bestow his goods. He could easily have relieved himself of a portion of his abundance, and many homes would have been freed from want, many who were hungry would have been fed, many naked clothed, many hearts made glad, many prayers for bread and clothing answered, and a melody of praise would have ascended to heaven. The LORD had heard the prayers of the needy, and of His goodness He had prepared for the poor. (Psalm 68:10.) Abundant provision for the wants of many had been made in the blessings bestowed upon the rich man. But he closed his heart to the cry of the needy, and said to his servants, "This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

This man's aims were no higher than those of the beasts that perish. He lived as if there were no God, no heaven, no future life; as if everything he possessed were his own, and he owed nothing to God or man. The psalmist described this rich man when he wrote, "The fool has said in his heart, There is no God." Psalm 14:1.

This man has lived and planned for self. He sees that the future is abundantly provided for; there is nothing for him now but to treasure and enjoy the fruits of his labours. He regards himself as favoured above other men, and takes credit to himself for his wise management. He is honoured by his fellow townsmen as a man of good judgment and a prosperous citizen. For "men will praise you, when you doest well to yourself." Psalm 49:18.

But "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." 1 Corinthians 3:19. While the rich man is looking forward to years of enjoyment, the LORD is making far different plans. The message comes to this unfaithful steward,

“You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you.” Here is a demand that money cannot supply. The wealth he has treasured can purchase no reprieve. In one moment that which he has toiled through his whole life to secure becomes worthless to him. “Then whose shall those things be which you have provided?” His broad fields and well-filled granaries pass from under his control. “He heaps up riches, and knows not who shall gather them.” Psalm 39:6.

The only thing that would be of value to him now he has not secured. In living for self he has rejected that divine love which would have flowed out in mercy to his fellow men. Thus he has rejected life. For God is love, and love is life. This man has chosen the earthly rather than the spiritual, and with the earthly he must pass away. “Man that is in honour, and understands not, is like the beasts that perish.” Psalm 49:20.

“So is he that lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” The picture is true for all time. You may plan for merely selfish good, you may gather together treasure, you may build mansions great and high, as did the builders of ancient Babylon; but you cannot build wall so high or gate so strong as to shut out the messengers of doom. Belshazzar the king “feasted in his palace,” and “praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.” But the hand of One invisible wrote upon his walls the words of doom, and the tread of hostile armies was heard at his palace gates. “In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain,” and an alien monarch sat upon the throne. (Daniel 5:30)

To live for self is to perish. Covetousness, the desire of benefit for self's sake, cuts the soul off from life. It is the spirit of Satan to get, to draw to self. It is the spirit of Christ to give, to sacrifice self for the good of others. “And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life.” 1 John 5:11, 12.

Wherefore He says, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.”

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