

Topic.—The Teaching and Practice of Jesus: The Business of Daily Life.

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The business of daily life is here to stay. It is a necessity of our existence. It is not only legitimate and proper, when conducted honorably and without injury to our fellow-men, but it has also the special attention and approval of Jesus Christ and his apostles. There is as much in the Bible about men's bodies as there is about their souls; and God is as really concerned about the life which now is as about the life which is to come. Since Jesus Christ worked at the carpenter's bench, all legitimate labor is sacred, and since the divine Son of God tasted death for every man, every man has a new value. He is a man for whom Christ died. He may be poor, unlearned and friendless on earth; he may be only a tramp—a penniless wanderer on the face of the earth—but he is a man for whom Christ died, and his interests are thought of and cared for beyond the stars. The very hairs of his head are numbered.

If Jesus Christ had been a visionary or an imposter, he would have ignored the temporal interests of his fellow men, as all religious humbugs have done from the beginning; but because he was genuine, because he was the divine Son of God, he was interested in all that pertains to man both in this life and in that which is to come. No marvel is it then that, in the days of his sojourn on earth, the weary and heavy-laden gathered about him and hung upon his words; that the great unwashed, unchurched throng that hung on the horizon like a dark threatening cloud turned to him as the flowers to the Sun—Phariseism and priestism had excommunicated them, but the Son of God loved them and they knew it, they felt it, they responded to it. No wonder is it, either, that the Book which tells of his love and sympathy, of his beneficent ministry and sacrificial death, has been wet with the tears of sorrow and thumbed by the horny hands of toil in all the ages since.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is designed to touch and hallow our life at every point, and, of course, is meant to affect us in our social and business relations. It is taking the world a long time to learn the lesson of the sacredness of life and work; but it is being learned. Men are coming to see that no work, if it be legitimate, is common or unclean; that the old time distinction between "Sacred" and "Secular" is effete and unscientific; that God has linked together, in indissoluble bonds, diligence in business, earnestness of spirit and divine service; and what God has joined together no man may put asunder.

It is no sin to be rich and it is no sin to be poor. Nor is it any sin for a poor man to try to become rich by honest means. It is a lot of money but the love of money that is "a root of all kinds of evil."

These are the general facts of the case. But what does Jesus teach as to the relation of his religion to the business of daily life.

1. It is apparent from both the letter and the spirit of the Gospel that *the religion of Jesus Christ is not hostile to business*. Religion is above business, it is true. It is above business in character, in spirit, in aim. It is above business in its demands and in its final outcome. The issues of business terminate here; the issues of religion reach onward and upward forever. But there should be no quarrel or discord between them. There is no need to neglect one's farm, or merchandise, or shop, or politics in order to care for the interests of the soul.

Why should there be any hostility between grace and trade? By natural impulses, by the love of our kindred, by the divine law of labor, written in the structure of mind and body we are incited to toil. By yet profounder principles and more far-reaching laws are we led to think of God and prompted to worship Him. Religion and business, then, being alike essential they cannot be mutually antagonistic without making God the author of confusion, which is impossible. The same God who has put us under the necessity of work has put him under the necessity of worship. Yet who has not heard men plead the pressure of business as an excuse for their lack of interest in things spiritual? When, in the case of any man, religion and business come into conflict there must be something wrong either with the man, or his religion or his business. There is something rotten about a man's business when he has to work seven days in the week, or when he is obliged to work so hard during six days of the week that he must rob God and his own soul on the Seventh. "But godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Vast business is no valid reason for little piety. There are men in all our cities who are first-rate business men and first-rate Christians at the same time. There have been men the sails of whose commerce have whitened all seas and yet whose Christlike lives and deeds of benevolence have reached even beyond their commerce.

2. *Religion is not intended to be divorced from business*. There are misguided people who seek to separate them. In this way they think to avoid antagonism. Religion, they say has no business with business; business has no business with religion. We will have both; we believe in both. But each shall be kept in its own place and time—the work days and tweed for business; Sunday and broadcloth for religion. Business has the shop, the market, the office, the counting room. Religion has the sanctuary. The former are placarded; "No admittance except on business"; on the door of the latter is written: "Devoted to religion." Each is rigorously confined to its own sphere. Yet, what think you would happen if a single petition of a prayer which such persons offer every Lord's Day were answered? What if, when they say "Thy Kingdom come," his Kingdom really should come! What a Crash! What an overturning! What an "unbalancing" of trade! What a house-cleaning in the realm of politics, if that petition were answered on the spot! Manifestly, religion and business are not to be divorced. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

3. *Religion is designed to be helpful to business*. How?

(1) *By sanctifying and making delightful the law of labor*. In the light of God's character of love and mercy, as revealed in Christ we re-read the words: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" and, in that light, we no longer see in them a threat or the pronouncing of a sentence of doom. But we read in them a beneficent law—a law that is on the line of original human endowments and one which, if obeyed, would make always for man's elevation and happiness. So then, labor is not drudgery any more, but service to God. Honest work is worship. Work cannot fret us if we love God and "do all

things as seeing him who is invisible."

(2) *By prompting to diligence*. From the days of Obadiah until now, the fact has been notorious that "the Saints make the best servants." "Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings." From every direction godliness brings motives to diligence. By the shortness and uncertainty of life; by the sacredness of work; by the solemnity and strenuousness that eternity throws back over our span of life here; by the ever-seeing, ever-loving eye of the divine Father, and by our kinship with His divine Son and the redeemed in glory, we are impelled to make the best and the most of this present life.

(3) *By inculcating uprightness and integrity*. A Christian man is an honest man. There may be principle without piety; there can be no piety without principle. If a man is not honest he is not a Christian. Piety involves honesty and honesty makes for business prosperity in the long run. After all, who are the solidly prosperous men in the circle of our acquaintance? Are they not the men who have established a reputation for uprightness and fair dealing? They may be close; they may be exact, but they are honest. Your ambiguous man, your man of crooked policy does not wear. He gets found out. People may laugh at his tricks, but they do not trust him. Mutual confidence is the foundation of the social fabric. Without faith it is impossible to do business, and if there were no honesty, there would be no faith. Therefore it is that honesty makes for success.

(4) *By enforcing the law of love*. The teaching of Jesus soars very high regarding our social and business life. He says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." It is not enough to be honest. The law of the land may be satisfied with a hundred cents on the dollar; the law of love is not. To be the children of our Father in heaven we must be more than honest. How much does a man love himself? So must he love his neighbor or come short of heaven's law. But who does it? Not even they who say that they live without sin. Yet this is the ideal. What a transformation there would be in the world of commerce if this law of love were fully obeyed! And just in so far as it is acted upon does it tend to ultimate business success.

(5) *By enabling us to bear with the disappointments and losses that come to us in business*. Jesus teaches that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," and so, when health or friends or comforts are swept away, we are led to "look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Believing that all property is God's; that the portion which we call our own is only ours in a secondary sense, and for purposes of administration at that; believing that money is a means and not an end and that it can matter but little to his real interests whether a man is rich or poor, the child of God is not utterly cast down when riches take wings and fly away. It is plain that such a view of life and property must have a "nerving" and sustaining influence in the midst of the reverses that are often incident to business life.

(6) *By tempering business relations*, making men peaceable, gentle, gracious and considerate towards one another; teaching "every man to look not on his own things, but to look also on the things of others; establishing mutual helpfulness and trust; elevating the tone of Masterhood and Servant-hood, and promoting every real interest of man for time and eternity.