

The Quiet Hour.

The Parable of the Talents.*

Delivered unto them his goods, v. 14. It is to His professed followers, to His church, that the Lord Jesus has committed the interests of His kingdom, while He is away. Humanly speaking, His kingdom will advance or recede, will stand or fall, according to the fidelity of His people. Men will judge of Christianity by the lives of Christians; it may be discredited or commended by their conduct.

To one he gave five talents, v. 15. When we confine the meaning of the word "talent" (as is so commonly done) to mental ability, we are giving it a narrower sense than is indicated by the parable. Any means of grace is a talent, anything by the proper use of which we may grow in likeness to Christ and in fitness for God's service. So also, a talent is any opportunity of usefulness, any opportunity for extending Christ's kingdom. All do not enjoy equal opportunities either for growth or service, but there is no one in a Christian community, of whom it can fairly be said that he has not, at least, one talent which he may use, if he will, to the glory of God.

Went and traded with same, v. 16. Whatever talent God has given you, use it. If, for example, you have had a Christian home, if you have the opportunity of attending Sabbath School and divine worship, if you have other Christian privileges and means of grace, use these things so that you may be the wiser and better for them. In like manner, if God has given you health, education, influence, ability to teach, wealth to distribute, He expects you to use these things for the service of men and the glory of His name.

He that had received one. . . . hid his Lord's money, v. 18. This is not intended to suggest that the unfaithful ones are always found among those who have few talents. But it does call our attention to a danger which besets those who are less richly gifted. These are apt to think that since there is not much that they can do, it is not worth while for them to do anything. Those who have least may and should be as faithful as those who have most.

Other five talents, v. 20. God has given us privileges, abilities, opportunities. If we will, we may live in the midst of these things indolently and selfishly; or if we will, we may so possess and use them that they will result in good done to men and souls gained for God. The former life may seem the easier and more attractive; but when Jesus comes, how glad we shall be if we can say: "Lord, Thou deliveredst to me talents; behold, I have gained other talents."

His Lord said unto him, Well done, v. 21. Notice the various elements in the reward of the faithful servant. There is first his master's commendation. He is "openly acknowledged in the day of judgment." Then there is the opportunity for larger and more honorable service, "I will make thee ruler over many things." And withal the faithful servant enters upon the possession of such deep and eternal joy as his Master Himself experiences.

I knew thee that thou art an hard man, v. 24. Wrong thoughts of God have a great

deal to do with keeping men from His service. Many a young man hesitates to enter upon a Christian life because he thinks he will be serving a hard master, whose service is bondage, and who is an enemy to human happiness. Such as these need to have their eyes opened by God's spirit, that they may see God in Jesus Christ.

Thou wicked and slothful servant, v. 26. These stern words are spoken, not to one who had squandered his Master's property, but to one who had failed to use and improve it. It is sometimes said of men who live for themselves, that they are "harmless." God is not satisfied that a man should be harmless. He expects from us something more positive. He has placed us here to be something and to do something, not merely to exist; and he who has simply lived, and who has made nothing of himself and done nothing with himself, will be condemned.

To have put my money to the exchangers, v. 27. "Whatever machinery or organization the Church possesses for utilizing opportunities which individual men fail to exercise, may be thought of as analogous to the banking system of the old world. When men in the Middle Ages gave to a cathedral or a college, when they subscribe largely now to hospitals or missions, doing this and nothing more, they are "giving their money to the exchangers." It is not so acceptable an offering as willing and active service, but if it be honestly and humbly given by those whose wealth is their one talent, the giver will not lose his reward."—Plumtree.

Take therefore the talent from him, v. 28. This law of retribution seems to work everywhere throughout God's universe. That which is not used is lost. A muscle that is not exercised tends to degenerate and lose its power. So, while faithful work is rewarded by openings for work of a higher kind, he who will not use the privileges and opportunities of this life is deprived of them in the life to come.

Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, v. 30. This is the other side of the punishment of the unprofitable servant. This is positive penal infliction, the doom of wickedness. Whatever else may be involved in it, this seems clear, that it means banishment from the presence of God, and conscious, continued existence in a condition of misery. It is the punishment which God's unchanging justice demands.

"Just for To-day."

Lord, for to-morrow and its needs,
I do not pray;
Keep me from every stain of sin
Just for to-day.

Let me both diligently work
And duly pray;
Let me be kind in word and deed
Just for to-day.

Let me be slow to do my will—
Prompt to obey;
Help me to sacrifice myself
Just for to-day.

Let me no wrong or idle word
Unthinking say;
Set thou a seal upon my lips
Just for to-day.

So for to-morrow and its needs
I do not pray;
But keep me, guide me, hold me up,
Just for to-day.

True Faith.

If we would translate saving faith, such as is illustrated in the Epistle to the Hebrews into a modern equivalent, we might call it faith in the victory of the good, in the victory of holy love and of self-surrender to the blessed purpose of God in Christ.

What a change would be produced in our ordinary lives if even in this sense we were men of faith in the possibilities of life for ourselves, if we only embrace the promises of goodness and of God. Most of us accept a poor idea of what is possible for us to be or do. We live by conventional standards; and do not realize how rich and helpful life can be made through love, hope, and faith in God. Such a want of faith paralyzes effort. "It was easy enough for Abraham," we say, "to whom God gave a distinct command, to rise and go forth from Mesopotamia." But what do we know of the nature of that voice which spoke to him? Are we sure that it was more distinct or more authoritative and personal than the voices which speak to ourselves every day—the voices of purity or of kindness and self-sacrifice which whisper to us of the right path, the right act, the right thought, the right word? It should be ours to embrace the Divine promises that come to us in these ordinary ways, and to live by self-surrender to them. It is thus we can be true children of Abraham, and inheritors of his faith and blessing.

Life brings untold possibilities of good to each of us, but what we need is faith in these, especially when we are immersed in the petty details, the drudgeries, the coarser passions, and trials which daily come to us. We need this faith in a Divine calling and in the promise of God, when the world and the flesh and the devil appeal to our sloth or to our self-indulgence, and we are tempted to take the low standard of the world, and to be, as they say, "no better than the rest." It is then we need faith in Christ, and, at whatever cost, to surrender ourselves to the vision which he vouchsafes of what is right and true and good. It may be hard just then to obey, to take this particular cross, to lay aside the indulgence that fascinates, and to turn at once from the tempter to the Saviour; but in so doing lies the way of faith and victory. Sunday Magazine.

Begin To-day.

Is there nothing that Christ as your friend, your Lord, your Saviour, wants you to do that you are leaving undone to-day? Do you doubt one instant, with his high and deep love for your soul, that he wants you to pray? And do you pray? Do you doubt one instant that it is his will that you should honor and help and bless all the men about you who are his brethren? And are you doing anything like that? Do you doubt one instant that his will is that you should make life serious and lofty? Do you doubt one instant that he wants you to be pure in deed and word and thought? And are you pure? Do you doubt one instant that his command is for you openly to own him and declare that you are his servant before all the world? And have you done it? These are the questions which make the whole matter clear. No, not in quiet lanes, nor in the bright temple courts, as once he spoke, and not from blazing heavens as men sometimes seem to expect—not so does Christ speak to us. And yet he speaks! I know what he—there in all his glory—he, here in my heart—wants me to do to-day, and I know that I am not mistaken in my knowledge. It is no guess of mine. It is his voice that tells me.—Phillips Brooks.

*S. S. Lesson Feb. 10, 1901; Mark 25:14-30.
Golden Text, Rom. 14:12. So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God.