

and next day sent in the shelves, which fitted into their place exactly, and gave the minister entire satisfaction. Smith, feeling that the job was too paltry to demand particular attention or trouble, appeared at the house to take his measurements the day after Jones had finished his work, and executed the order about three weeks afterward; and then his shelves did not fit, and were returned. A few days after that, Smith, to his intense vexation, heard that Jones had been appointed to furnish the church throughout with new pews.

The small commission, we see, was given first as a test. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." Now this is not the point of the parable of the talents; but it is the point of the parable of the pounds. In the former, the gifts differ in value "according to the several ability" of the servants, but equal faithfulness produces relatively equal results, the five talents making five more, and the two making two. In the latter the gifts are the same, but the zeal and ability displayed in their use vary, and the results differ accordingly. The former illustrates (as one commentator well expresses it) "equal fidelity with different degrees of advantage;" the latter, "different degrees of improvement of the same opportunities." In fact, the "pounds," in order of thought, comes before the "talents." By the employment of the "pounds" the "several ability" of the servants is tested and determined; and then follow the larger and varying gifts of "talents." Thus the reward in the "pounds" is—"Have thou authority over ten cities"—"Be thou also over five cities;" just like the giving of the talents, "to one five, to another two." And when we observe that the "talent" was sixty times larger than the "pound," we see the reasonableness of taking the parable of the pounds as in this sense introductory to that of the talents, although in other respects they run parallel—in their teaching, for instance, about the slothful servant, and about the account to be given to the returning master.

Next look at the historical circumstances of this parable of the pounds. We shall find them leading us to the same conclusion.

The evangelist Luke is particularly careful to record the occasion and design of our Lord's parables; see chap. 7 40; 10. 29, 30; 12. 13, 16; 13. 1. 6; 14. 15, 16; 15. 1-3; 16. 15, 19; 18. 1, 9. And now we read that "He added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." What their expectations and feelings were, we can see

a few verses further, where the entry into Jerusalem is described—"the whole multitude of the disciples rejoicing and praising God with a loud voice," and saying, "Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord." Just before, too, as we learn from Matthew and Mark (see Matt. 20. 17, 20, 29; Mark 10. 32, 35, 46), had occurred the request of James and John for the seats on Christ's right and left hand in the kingdom they were now expecting to be immediately set up. Jesus, therefore, had a two-fold object in this parable: First, to intimate that the kingdom was not coming yet; that he was to go first; and secondly, that during his absence his followers would be tested, and that the honours and rewards to be allotted them on his return would be proportioned to their fitness as revealed by the tests.

It may be asked, Why did not he tell them plainly? Why give such important teachings in the half-veiled form of a parable? But he had been plain already, and they would not accept his words. As regards the delay of his kingdom, it is most remarkable that the request of James and John followed immediately on his announcement of his approaching sufferings and death (Matt. 20; Mark 10); and as regards fitness for high places, his reply to that request distinctly showed that these would be given to those only who could "drink his cup" of woe and "be baptized with his baptism" of suffering.

But see how the parable meets the two points:

1. Jesus draws from contemporary history a striking illustration of his approaching departure, of the reason for it, and of his future return. Thirty years before, Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, had gone, on his father's death, to Rome to get the kingdom of Judea confirmed to him by his suzerain, the Emperor—a step rendered the more necessary because of the disaffection of the Jews, who actually sent a deputation to Rome to oppose his claims. So says the parable: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return . . . But his citizens hated him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'" And as in the historical event, so in the parable, the claimant to the throne presently "returned, having received the kingdom." Ver. 15. Here we see the intimation—(1) That Jesus was not going to take his kingdom on earth at once; (2) That he was going into "a far country" to be invested with it—a hint that his absence would be long; (3) That his claims would be rejected by men, and by the Jews especially; (4) That nevertheless he would