

What Shall We Have?

BY Z. L. FASH.

Text: What shall we have therefore? Matt. 19:27.

Introduction—These words were given to me the other day as I sat in a home and talked with a man upon religious subjects. They have been ringing in my ears ever since and I want to write them before you in large letters of light. They appeal to my imagination and are full of suggestion. I am exceedingly thankful to this brother for giving us such a fruitful subject, "What shall we have?"

It is the question of Peter when he had recovered a little from his amazement at the words of Jesus to the rich young man. The Master had touched a tender place in the human heart, and the disciples as well as the rich young man were smarting under it. Their preconceived notions were upset, and their little ship seemed to be drifting from safe moorings upon the rocks. The theological structure which they had reared with so much pride was crushed like an eggshell in the grasp of a man. Suddenly these hopeful disciples lose the trail. They wander in the wilderness without a pathway. Their dreams were rudely shattered and their whole plan of salvation seemed a myth, an impossibility, "who then can be saved?"

There is no more pitiful wall in the world than that. The fine fire of the flashing eye is gone, the bright beaming countenance is burned out with hopelessness and the sprightliness is gone out of the step. Dejection and despair are written on every line of the countenance and every movement of the body. That is why men commit suicide, they have lost hope in God and think they can't be saved. That is where the teachings of Robert Ingersoll leads young men. He gives them no hope of the future. His books are the *ignis fatuus* which lure them farther and further into the blackness of doubt and the Sloughs of Despond. Falsehood is dressed in the garb of truth, and flimsy criticisms are so attractively clothed, that they appear to be angels of light to those who have not sufficient penetrating power. Human reason is defiled and men who refuse to worship God bow down before themselves. I pity from the bottom of my heart any one who is in the fogs of doubt and cannot or will not hear the fog-horn. The writings of such men as Ingersoll never brought a bewildered boy into the harbor of safety. They never elevated his moral character as much as they emphasize the paramount importance of truth. The lives of the men who propound these doctrines too often belie their words. You cannot get sweet water from a bitter fountain or blood from a stone. Men with tarnished characters never save men. They are uncertain lights. They may appear to elevate for a time but it is only from the aberration in our sight. The setting sun is really below the horizon when he appears to us to be above. Such teachers hold out no hope, and men go down to the day of their death with the despairing dirge, "who then can be saved?"

But Jesus Christ does not thus deal with men. He is honest with them. He never deceived an anxious soul with the form of fine words. He lays bare the sins of their hearts. Unhesitatingly he opens a putrifying sore, but only to hasten its healing. His diagnosis discovers the disease.

That was the case before us. A rich young man had come to Jesus to inquire what he must do to obtain eternal life. With one swift stroke Jesus shattered the costly vase which held his gold. Quickly he gathered it up and poured it into his own heart; and his soul became as heavy as lead. He went away sad, and that which was his chief delight now sapped his eternal prospects. He had the golden touch, but he needed the touch of Christ. He possessed great riches, but it was not in burglar proof vaults and thieves could break through and steal. His love of money had imperceptibly undermined his character, and now when he has the opportunity to make the most of himself and his money he cannot rise. He is fettered to his gold. His soul can fly no higher. What ought to have been his useful servant has become his master. He put it ahead of Christ, and lost his soul.

Is not that the chief danger with great wealth? Are we not constantly tempted to worship the creature instead of the creator? It is not the money that is sinful, but our love of the money. Every one of us is in danger of making a golden calf and bowing down before it. The mere possession may be the smallest passion. To covet is to sin, and some of the biggest sinners are not millionaires but paupers. The one who lives discontentedly in a hut and longs to possess a palace is not far removed from this rich young man. The love of money, whether we possess it or not, is the root of all evil.

I have no doubt this young man was a shrewd financier. He turned every cent to the best advantage, but this time he made a bad bargain. He stepped into the scales and found out that he was a light weight. His gold weighed more than he did. He came to Jesus for the elixir of life, and to his great surprise Jesus offered him the gold cure. He was a drunkard, and so fixed was the habit, that he refused the only remedy, distributing his wealth for Jesus' sake. He made a bad bargain and revealed the weakness of his soul.

That is what stirred these disciples. Jesus put his finger on their pulse and felt it flutter, when he said "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." He did not say it was impossible, but they were taken so suddenly in an unguarded and weak point that they immediately concluded no rich man could be saved. It did not stagger them because they had great possessions themselves, for they had not; but it cut deep to their hearts, for there still remained some latent longings for the goods of this world for their own sake. Jesus assures them that what seems impossible with men is quite possible with God and that he may save even a rich man, though it is no easy task.

That seems to have given back Peter his breath. Hastily he reviews his conduct since he became a disciple of Jesus. With one glance he thinks he has swept it clean and so he says, "Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"

Poor Peter how little he knew his own heart. Was he mercenary when he asked "what shall we have therefore?"

It is the old impetuous, self-asserting Peter again. There is altogether too low a tone to the question. This exalted Apostle betrays human weakness and is too eager for reward. He shows his ignorance concerning the character of the kingdom. Peter still hankers for promotion, and temporal advantages. He wishes to be thought somebody. We see this even after the resurrection of our Lord, when the disciples asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?" There was, I fear, something mercenary clinging to this question of Peter's. It did not get above the popular Jewish idea of a temporal kingdom.

They had an object lesson in this rich young man. He was found wanting when Jesus put the supreme test, to sell all and forsake all for Christ's sake. They had not sold all, for many of them had families to support; but they had forsaken all, and they had renounced all their property which might be a hindrance in service. A great revulsion of feeling swept over them in the few minutes following their despairing question, when they had thought salvation unattainable. The sacrifices they had made for Christ loomed up big before them, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee." That was true. They had forsaken home, and friends and occupations and entered upon a life of self-denial for Jesus' sake. They were not rich and yet they had broken many fond ties and made great sacrifices. Matthew was a man of some means, and James and John, sons of Zebedee, had hired servants. It is true Matthew had left the custom house and offered to restore four fold to any man he had wronged. Peter and the rest of them had left a few boats and fishing nets; but they were of little financial value. And yet Peter speaks of this as though they had done some great thing, and were deserving of some great reward. I guess we are very much like them. We are very apt to make altogether too much of our sufferings and sacrifices for the church and Christ. We hold them up and magnify them in the eyes of our friends. How small it seems when we get God's view, and remember that after we have done all we are unprofitable servants. If we gave every moment of our lives in uncomplaining and uncompromising service to Jesus Christ it would be a small return for his undying love to us. How small it all seems when we are doing our best. We never complain or criticize when we do our whole duty without the hope of reward for Jesus' sake. There was, we fear, considerable of the mercenary about that question which Peter asked, "What shall we have therefore?"

But witness the love of Christ to ignorant, selfish, prejudiced men. Christ knew the slowness of their hearts, but he does not upbraid them. It is true, that when looked at without prejudice they had given very little and much less than they themselves imagined, and yet Christ would not wound them. They had done much for him. It was little they had forsaken, and yet like the widow's mite it was their all. It was dear to them. It meant much, and the Christ sympathetically overlooked what they had magnified. He went straight to the heart of things and saw beneath the husks the kernel of ripened grain. The value of service with Jesus is according to what a man hath, be it little or much. If he gives the little cheerfully it is as great as though he had more.

Peter was right then in spite of some wrong conception. There is a reward for those who serve twice. He is the best pay master in the world. He does not reprove Peter here for his question, because there is mixed up in it faith, and love and hope. There is a reward for those who love God, and serve him faithfully. What shall we have is the question of trusting faith as "What shall we do" is the question of obedient faith.

Jesus again touches the weak spot of the disciples' natures, not this time to make their pulse flutter with fear but with hope. He comes not to probe but to please. He turns the river so that the unproductive deserts of their souls become fertile. He takes this passion for gain which is God given, and turns it into the channels of the kingdom. That which left to itself would degenerate, he regenerates. A motive which would ruin the

soul, he stimulates to save the soul. A Paul blindly persecuting suddenly has his zeal converted and increased to build up the church. It was Jesus who touched him to turn and temper him for his times. His weakness became his strength. Jesus Christ only hurts to heal. He never leaves a wound undressed or a case uncared for. He alone knows how to take our weak lives and make them strong.

You see how he did it in the incident before us. He lifts these despairing disciples out of the slough of despond. When they were about to lose all hope he gives them double confidence. Instead of repressing the desire of gain which was born with them, and which will be with them throughout eternity, he lets this ambition light their souls. Under its brightness they can see the way clearly before them. It beams in the blackest night, and shows them a sure footing over the rugged pathway of life. The child of God can make no mistake and can never be lost when he has this light in his heart. He knows that Jesus Christ rewards his children.

But what is this reward? What shall we have therefore? The question is still before us to answer. Can it be satisfactorily answered? Did Jesus give any material on which to base our reply? We think so. Nothing could be more plain. The remaining verses of the chapter are most emphatic in their assertions. The twelve Apostles are to occupy a place of peculiar prominence and power, sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. That is the imagination of Jesus' picturing the prominence and power of the twelve Apostles, his chief associates. Then every one who has forsaken houses or brethren or sisters or father or mother, or wife, or children or lands, for the sake of Christ shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life. There is no uncertain sound in those words.

But there is still a question. Does this apply to this life? Is the Christian rewarded here for his faithfulness? There is no doubt about it. Does the hundred fold mentioned here apply to this life? Most assuredly. It would be better translated we are told by "manifold more," "many time more." Mark says "a hundred fold now in this time, houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." That puts the meaning beyond a doubt. In his sermon on the Mount Jesus said "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." In I Cor. 3:20, 23, the Apostle tells us that all things belong to the believer, and his epistle to Timothy "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Certainly these passages apply to this world. The Christian has his reward in this life.

Does that mean that he is to have great material prosperity if he forsakes all for Christ? The Old Testament teaches very clearly that if the children of Israel do as God commands they shall prosper. Their flocks and their kine will increase, and they shall feed on the fat of the land. If the Christian is consecrated to Christ, will he have great worldly riches?

Why here we are back where we started. How easy it is for us to ask this question, and how we long for an answer to justify us in hoarding up great wealth. Let me make my meaning plain. I believe this is the teaching of God's word. There is nothing to prevent a rich man entering the Kingdom of God except himself. Christ never barred him out though he faithfully warned him of his dangers. Wealth is a great blessing when it is rightly obtained and rightly used. Gold may do much good, and I believe if God has given a Christian the ability to make money, that is his talent for the building up of the kingdom on earth. But there are more things in heaven and earth than gold. That may be a curse to a man and cripple him. God's greatest blessing may be persecution and the loss of wealth. Sickness may become an angel visitor. Sorrow may sweep the heart of a man clean. Misfortune may save his soul. Jesus promised the young man treasure in heaven if he would forsake all on earth.

I believe that the godly man has a right to every legitimate use of money, but money cannot purchase happiness. There are a great many people living in palaces who would gladly give all they possess to regain the health and happiness of their old humble home. I want to repeat it so loudly that everyone shall hear me, the greatest reward of the Christian on earth is to enjoy the presence of Christ. If we have him we have everything. He is our treasure in heaven brought to earth. Have you got him in your life? It is a great reward for the little faith and love we give him at our conversion. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things shall be added unto you." "The Kingdom is first, reward next."

But Jesus knows the human heart perfectly. It is an open book to him. He would not have these disciples make the mistake that their great reward in this life is given on their merits or their sacrifices alone. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. That is, our reward is God's gift. It is of grace. This he makes plain by the parable following, of the laborers in the vineyard. The one who went in at the eleventh hour received as much wages as the one who began in at the third. Even the treasures of heaven which we are permitted to enjoy