

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE HONOURED SERVANT.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.”—Proverbs xxvii. 18.

In Solomon's day, every man sat under his own vine and fig tree, and there was peace throughout the whole country. Then, God's law about dividing out the land among the people, so that every man had his own plot, was rightly observed, and each one had a fig tree of his own, to which he gave his personal attention; and, in due time, having waited upon the fig tree, and kept it, he ate the fruit thereof. Solomon says, in another place, “In all labour there is profit;” and it is well when men feel that it is so, for then they will be inclined to labour. A man would not long keep a fruitless fig tree. If he was quite sure that no fruit would be the result of his toil, he would leave the tree to itself, or else he would say, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”

There were some men, in Solomon's day, who, for divers reasons, became servants to others,—as there still are, and always must be;—and they looked for some return from their service; and the wise man here tells them that, just as “whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.” It is a commonplace truth that those who are faithful servants ought to be honoured; I wish, in these times, that matter was more often thought of, and that men did honour those who are faithful to them. There are some people, who permit others to minister to their comfort, but it never occurs to them to provide for the comfort of their servants. They will allow a man to spend most of his life in increasing their business; and yet, when he is getting old, he is discharged, and left to perish by starvation so far as they are concerned. I notice this kind of thing frequently, with very much regret; and I am not always able to make exceptions on behalf of Christian masters; for, sometimes, they seem only to recollect their business, and to forget that they are Christians, and they act as cruelly as did that Amalekite in David's day, who left his servant to die because he

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was sick. I pray that the time may come when there shall be so good an understanding between all men that Solomon's words shall be true, "he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured." I am sorry that they are not always true in that sense now, but I am going to leave that literal meaning of the words, and apply the text to those who wait upon the Lord Jesus, having made him to be their Master; for, most certainly, as surely as he who keeps the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, even much more certainly shall those who wait upon our great Master in heaven find a sweet return from their service, for they shall be honoured by him. Very simple will my talk be, and you, beloved, who are his servants, do not want anything else, I am sure.

I. The first observation is, that **OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS OUR MASTER.**

He said to his disciples, after he had washed their feet, "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am." Is it so with you, dear friends? Let conscience answer the question. Is Jesus Christ really Master and Lord to each one of us? It is a wonderful way in which he does master us, if we are indeed his servants. I can never forget how, in my own case, it came to pass that I, who had been bought with his precious blood, and therefore belonged to him, had yet lived forgetful of his claims. He passed by, and looked on me; and that very look made me go out to weep bitterly. But he did more; he laid his hand on me,—it was a pierced hand; and from that day I had a twist in my understanding and my judgment; those who knew me saw that something extraordinary had happened to me, which had altogether changed me. From that time, I thought very little of men, and very much of One whom, until then, I had despised; many of my former pursuits ceased to have the slightest charm for me, and I had, for my one pursuit, the desire to do everything to his honour and glory. From that twist I have never been able to escape, and I have never wanted to do so; from that mystic influence which he cast over me I have never come forth; and, what is more, I trust I never shall. I know that I am describing many of you as well as myself. Oh! did he not master you from head to foot? If you are really converted, it was not the conversion of the feelings only, or the intellect only; it was the subjugation of everything within you to that sweet power of his. You were quite broken down; you had no strength to stand up against him any longer; and the joy of it was that you had not any wish to do so. When he was about to fix the chains of his love upon you, you held out your hands, saying, "Here, Lord, bind my wrists;" you put forth your feet, crying, "Place the fetters here also." You asked him to cast a chain around your heart; you made a covenant with him, and agreed to be bound all over, for that part of you which was unbound you reckoned to be enslaved, and only that which he did bind you considered to be free. When he had so mastered us, we longed to lie for ever at his feet, and weep ourselves away; or we wished to sit for ever at his feet, and listen to his wondrous words, and learn his blessed teaching; yet we also wanted to run about the world on his errands; it mattered not to us where he might send us, we would not make any choice of our sphere of service; if he would but employ us, that would

be all we would ask. We wanted then to have a dozen lives, and to spend them all for him. Ay, we remember singing,—

“ Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer’s praise ! ”

We said,—and we meant it,—

“ Had I ten thousand hearts, dear Lord,
I’d give them all to Thee ; ”

and we did give ourselves up wholly to our Lord. We could not help doing so ; we were carried right away, as when a mountain torrent comes, removes the earth from the young tree that is growing by the river side, and gradually undermines it, until the tree falls into the stream, and the current sweeps it on and on, and never lets it rest again, but bears it right down to the sea. So was it with us that blessed day when first we knew that we could call Christ “ Master and Lord.”

Brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ has so completely mastered us that now, to-day, *he is our sole Master*. It is not always a thing to ennoble a man when he is able to call another person his master ; but we feel that, the more fully we are mastered by Christ, the better will it be for us ; and the more absolutely we can become his servants, the more noble and honoured shall we be. In many passages of Scripture, where our translation uses the term “ servant ”, the true word is “ slave ” ; and I think the time has come when we had better speak of it as it ought to be, that we may learn the full force of the expression. We do not mean that there is any cruel slavery of Christ’s people to himself ; but we do mean that, just as much as the slave completely belonged to his master, to do his master’s bidding, to live or die at his master’s will, so have we given ourselves up unto Christ ; he has become our sole Master. There are others who struggle for the mastery over us ; but no man can serve two masters. He may serve two rival powers,—one struggling against the other for a while,—but they cannot both be masters ; only one can be supreme within the spirit. In this way, Christ has become so completely the believer’s Master that sin shall not have dominion over him, and he shall not be any longer under the domination of Satan. Christ is the Master of all his people, whatever happens to them. We may wander like sheep ; but Christ is still our Shepherd, and he will bring the straying sheep back, for they are still his property even when they are wandering away from him.

What say you, brothers and sisters ? Do you own any other master beside Christ ? If you do, in that divided sovereignty you shall find ten thousand miseries. Oh ! if your right eye is contrary to Christ, pluck it out, and cast it from you ; if your very life should stand up in rivalry with Christ, it would be much better for you that you should die than that you should lead such a life as that. Our Lord Jesus is the sole Master of us this day.

And what a *choice Master* he is also ! If we had had the opportunity, in our old state, of choosing our master, we were so blind and foolish that we would not have chosen him ; but if we had known then what we know now, we should have chosen him ; and if we knew

infinitely more about him, we should never discover a reason why he should not be our Master ; but we should continually find stronger arguments why we should be his servants for ever. There was never such a Master as our Lord Jesus Christ, who took our nature that he might be able to master such servants as we are, who even died to win us, and whose only mastership, after all, is that of love. He rules us sovereignly ; yet in his hand is the silver sceptre, not the rod of iron. Our Master is, at the same time, our Husband, whom we must obey. Oh ! it is blessed to obey him to whom our hearts are fully surrendered, and in whom all loveliness is centred. When a husband truly loves his wife, it becomes easy for the wife to be obedient unto her husband ; and as Christ loves us infinitely, we must love him and serve him in return. Look, by faith, into his blessed face ; it is Jehovah's joy to look upon him, and it shall be ours for ever. Was there ever such another countenance ? Was ever such loveliness imagined as really exists in him ? Look at all his character, from Bethlehem even until now ; peep in upon him in his loneliness, or see him in the midst of the crowd, and will you not say of him, "He is the standard-bearer among ten thousand ; yea, he is altogether lovely" ? Pick out all the charms that ever could be found in the most amiable character, gather up all the virtues that ever glittered in the most spiritual man or woman, and bring them all here. Ah ! but they are not worthy to be compared with the glory and beauty and excellency of the Well-beloved. All their goodness came from him, therefore let them all lie at his feet, for there is none to be compared with him.

Next, our spirit exultingly says, "As he is our choice Master, so he is *our chosen Master*. Since he has chosen us, we have learned to choose him. The love was, at first, all on his side ; but now, through the effectual working of his grace, it is on our side, too. We can each one say, "I love my Master ; I love his house ; I love his children ; I love his service ; I have chosen him to be mine for ever. If he should dismiss me from his service, I would come back to him again. If he gave me what men call liberty, I would beg of him to withdraw such accursed liberty, and let me be, for ever, and only, and completely, and entirely his ; for, as he has chosen me by his grace, so has his grace led me to choose him. I know that many of you can say the same ; and I daresay, while I have been speaking, you have been thinking of George Herbert's lines,—

"How sweetly doth 'my Master' sound ! 'My Master !'
As ambergris leaves a rich scent
Unto the taster :
So do these words give a sweet content
An oriental fragraney, 'My Master.'"

We delight to use this title concerning our Lord, for he is, further, *our gracious Master*. That word "Master" seems to lose the idea of masterfulness when it is applied to him. He is most graciously and wondrously our Lord ; but yet we call him no more "Baali," that is, "my Lord," but we call him "Ishi," that is, "my Man," "my Husband." There is, truly, a service to which we are called ; yet his message to his disciples was, "Henceforth I call you not servants ; for

the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." We never can forget that, with all his love, he is our Lord ; it is our joy to remember that ; yet what loving service we have received at his hands ! He has been so much our servant that we have sometimes had to ask ourselves, " Which is the servant ? " He is *Servus servorum*,—the Servant of servants,—as he proved when he washed his disciples' feet. He has done more than that for us ; for he stooped so low as to be despised of men, and rejected of the people, in order that he might save us. Then, surely, it shall be our joy, and bliss, and glory, henceforth to call him Master and Lord.

He is also *our life-long Master*. No ; that is a mistake, for there was, alas ! a time when we lived, yet we lived not unto him. Some of us were but boys when first we began to serve him. I always feel glad to think that I wore a boy's jacket when I was baptized into his name ; I had not assumed the garb of a man, but my whole soul was his, and I was buried with him. I wish it had been earlier still. O dear young people, there is no such joy as that of knowing Christ in your early youth ! We hear sometimes of life-long teetotallers, but I could wish that I had been a life-long abstainer from self-righteousness, a life-long drinker of the river of the water of life ; but, as all of us failed to serve the Lord at the beginning of our life, let us try, with all our hearts, to serve him right to the end. Oh, to have him for our life-long Master,—with no little intervals of running away, no furloughs, no holidays ! Brethren, we have our recreations in Christ's service, but we never have any holidays ; that is to say, he re-creates us, but he permits us to continue in his work without cessation or intermission. It would be no recreation for us to have a furlough from the great work of the Lord ; we only wish that we could live, and labour, and spend ourselves, and find our rest, as some birds do, on the wing, flying, mounting, singing, and so resting, and making this to be our continual joy. So, you see, we are in for our Master's service for life ; we have entered his employ, and we are bound to him ; and " neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," and Master, for ever blessed be his name !

II. Now I hasten, in the second place, to remind you that OUR BUSINESS IS TO SERVE OUR MASTER.

That business is expressed in the Hebrew of our text by the word "keep." I will read you the text as it should be rendered, and as the translators will make it read if they use their senses in their revision of the Old Testament ; that is, if they give the same meaning to a word in all places. The previous translators thought that the Bible would sound tautological if they gave the same translation of a word everywhere ; so, to charm the ears, they changed the words ; but then, alas ! they sometimes changed the sense. Here, the original ought to be rendered thus : " Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof : so he that keepeth his master shall be honoured." Is not that a wonderful word ? In the interpretation I am giving to the passage, it means that, as certainly as the husbandman keeps and

tends a fig tree, so you and I are to keep and tend Christ. Is it really true that he hath committed himself to our keeping? Yes. On earth, among the sons of men, there is One who keepeth Israel; but Israel, in another sense, is made to be a keeper, and is to keep the Lord Jesus Christ.

How are we to do that? Well, first, we must keep him *by always remaining his servants*. We must keep him as our Master. I like the idea of that man who once said to his master, "Sir, you talk about discharging me; but you see, sir, if you don't know when you have a good servant, I know very well when I have a good master, and I don't mean to be discharged. If you put me out of the front door, I shall come in at the back, for I have been your servant ever since I was a boy. I was born in your father's house, and I mean to die in this house." The gentleman saw that it was quite hopeless to try to get rid of the old man, as he would not go, so he decided they should not be parted; and I think some of us have come to the same pass with our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Truly, he knows that, in us, he has, even at our best, only unprofitable servants; but then he accepted us, he knew all that we were and all that we should be; he had a clear foresight of our whole future, and he has engaged us for life. Some of our friends think he only engaged them for a quarter or half a year, or for a limited period; but I know that he took me on for life, and for eternity, too; and my soul rejoices in the fact that he will keep to the bargain. Like the old man, I am determined that, if he puts me out at the front door, I will come in at the back, for I know that I have a good Master, and I will not go away from him. Do not you say the same, beloved? Then still hold on to him, and tell him that you will not let him go. Should he chasten you with the rod of men, and lay many stripes on you, yet be like some dogs that seem to love their masters all the better the more they beat them. So, dear friends, love your Lord all the better when he treats you roughly; kiss the hand that smites you, and let this be your settled resolution, that from him you will not go.

What else are we to do in order to keep our Master? I think, next, we are to keep him *by defending him*. We must defend our Lord's name, and honour, and cause at all costs and all hazards. We must not let him sleep like King Saul, with his spear stuck in the ground by his bolster, and his body-guard also asleep; but if the enemy should ever come to attack our Master, our watchword must be, "Up, guards, and at them!" Give them a warm reception from whatever quarter they may come. You and I, beloved, are put in charge of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and every child of God is bound to be upon the defensive just as if the keeping of the gospel depended entirely upon him. I believe that I am as much bound to preach against error, and to war for the truth of Christ, as if there were not another minister living, and I think that every other minister stands in the same responsible position, and it is the same with every Christian. Keep your Master and all that he has in safety; let no traitor come near him; guard his ordinances, his doctrines, his precepts; adore his matchless person, and extol his blessed work, and so keep him against all comers.

Then, dear friends, keep him *by guarding all his interests*. It is

the duty of a servant to reckon that what belongs to his master is, in a certain sense, his, and therefore to be sacredly defended. I have heard of servants, in the olden times, saying, "That is *our* park," "this is *our* country house," or "this is *our* town house," "these are *our* horses;" and one of them was heard by his master to say, "There come *our* children, bless their little hearts!" Well, they were no children of his, were they? Yes; they were, for they were his master's children; and he had become so identified with his master's interests that he regarded his master's children as belonging to him. So ought we to think of everything that appertains to Christ; and if the Lord has, anywhere, a little child who needs to be cared for, each of us who are his servants should be prepared to nurse it and watch over it for him, and say to him, with good Dr. Deddridge,—

"Hast thou a lamb in all thy flock
I would disdain to feed?
Hast thou a foe, before whose face
I fear thy cause to plead?"

Thus, dear friends, keep your Master; watch over your Master's possessions; guard your Master's truth; defend your Master's honour; care for your Master's children; as far as your power goes, try to keep everything that belongs to him, labour for the good of his cause; struggle for the advancement of his interests, and for the overthrow of his adversaries, just as every loyal soldier seeks to preserve his sovereign's dominions intact, and to keep his king's arms from suffering any dishonour. Thus let us keep our Master and all that belongs to him.

Now let us come back to our own Authorized Version: "He that waiteth on his master shall be honoured." This also is a very good translation, if not equal to the other; and I think it conveys an important meaning for us. You and I are like servants who wait upon their Master, and that waiting consists, in part, in *waiting for his orders*, trying to ascertain what they are; and, when we know them, waiting until he bids us carry them out. It is not intended that you and I should be inventors of rites, and ceremonies, and novelties of worship, and all manner of strange doctrines; our position is simply that of servants. Our Master has a certain way of setting out his table, and inviting his guests to it; and I have no business to go to him and say, "See how the king of Syria arranges his table; is not that a better plan than yours?" No, that would be utter disloyalty; I have to set the table according to my Master's plan and custom. There are some old country squires who have acquired odd ways of their own, and the servants whom they employ must drop into them, whatever their own notions may be. Now, the ways of the Lord are right; and it is your duty and mine to ask what they are, and to conform our practice to them.

The same rule is to be observed in matters of church government and discipline, in the ordinances of the Lord's house, in the truth to be preached, and in the way we go about our Master's business. It is not for us to make our own laws, or to invent our own methods; but just to wait upon our Master, and learn his will concerning everything. If we do not do that, we shall get into a world of trouble;

but if we wait upon him for our orders, and then obey the orders we receive from our Master, we shall be honoured.

Next, we must *wait upon him for strength to obey his orders*; for if we do not, we shall either fail in our attempts, or else we shall fail altogether to make the attempt. We must also wait upon our Master, *seeking his smile*. I am afraid we do a great deal to get the smiles of our brethren; and if they think we have done well, we congratulate ourselves. But, oh! to preach for the Master, to pray for the Master, to teach that class for the Master,—not for your pastor; not for the elders or deacons, not for your fellow-members, that they may say, “What a zeal for the Lord this person has!” Let it all be done for the Master. “He that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.” Do you not think that, sometimes, you and I wait upon ourselves, and that, while we are very busy, and fancying we are working for the Lord, we may be doing it entirely for self? Because we find some sort of pleasure in it, we keep on doing it just for that pleasure, or because we feel that some kind of credit must come to ourselves as the result of it. If we are serving self, not our Master, we shall have a reward, but it will be a poor commonplace reward, like that of the Pharisees, of whom the Master said, “Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.” That is the end of it; they have had their reward, and they cannot expect to be paid twice for what they have done.

We are, dear friends, further to wait upon the Lord *by expecting him to fulfil his promises*; and his promises will only be fulfilled in his own time. We are not to run before the Lord, nor to seek to hasten the Lord, as though we thought he was slow in accomplishing his purposes. If we ever do cry, “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord,” we shall probably receive for an answer, “Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion.” It is we who are asleep, the Lord never is; and we are to wait upon him, and plead the promises that he has given us.

This waiting also includes *acquiescence in his will*; not only doing it, but suffering it, being ready for anything that he may appoint,—perhaps, lying on a sick bed for months. Why, if we never rose again, and had to lie bedridden until we died, we ought to be perfectly willing so to wait on our Master. You remember the story of poor old Betty, who said that the Lord told her to do this and that, and she tried to do it, and at last he said to her, “Betty, go upstairs, and lie in your bed, and cough.” She said, “I am doing it, and I take satisfaction even in coughing if that be according to my Lord’s will.” If you have no will of your own in such matters, you will have very little sorrow. Our troubles mostly grow from the root of self-will; but when self-will is conquered, and we hold ourselves entirely at God’s disposal, then there is a sweetness even in wormwood and gall, and our heaviest cross becomes our joy and delight, and we say, with holy Rutherford, “I find the cross of Christ no more a burden to me than wings are to a bird, or sails are to a ship.” That saintly man said that, sometimes, he felt so deeply in love with his cross, that he almost feared lest his sufferings and grief should become so lovely to him as to be a rival to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no such danger, I am afraid, with the most of us, for we are as bullocks un-

accustomed to the yoke, and we kick against the pricks. But if you can wait upon your Master, and say, "Do with me as thou wilt, Lord," all will be well. Try to be like the shepherd on Salisbury Plain, whose story should never be forgotten. When he was asked, "Is it good weather?" he answered, "Yes, it is all good weather that God sends." "But does this weather please you?" "If it pleases God, it pleases me," was his reply. That is the point to get to; may God bring us there by his grace!

III. When we get there, we shall come to our last point, OUR SERVICE WILL BRING US HONOUR: "he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured."

O brethren, the thought of waiting upon Christ, and being his servant, is an unspeakable honour; therefore I will not try to speak about it, but ask you just to sit still, and think about it. You are his servants, the servants of the eternal Son of God. Perhaps somebody is going to be made an earl or a duchess. I do not think that would be any honour to you, for you have a higher honour than that already, for you are a servant of the Lord. There will be a coronet for somebody to wear; but really I do not see that it could add any lustre to you, for you are a prince of the blood-royal of the skies. As for our pedigree, there is none like it; we do not trace it to the Normans, but to Calvary; we are of that seed that was to crush the serpent's head. Our coat of arms is much more ancient than any that the Heralds' College can ever issue; we need no other honour, and can have no higher glory than to be servants of Christ. Are you only a little nurse-girl? Well, if you belong to Christ, you are one of those whom he counts right honourable. Are you a chimney-sweep, my brother? Never mind that; if the Lord has washed you in his precious blood, you are as noble as any peer of the realm, and nobler than most of them. Do you have to go to the workhouse for weekly help? Never mind about your poverty, you are not so poor now as your Lord was, for he had not where to lay his head. Do not talk about being mean and obscure; why, you are descended from the King of kings! "This honour have all his saints," "Unto you that believe he is an honour,"—that is the meaning of the Greek; and I take it that it is honour enough for us to have such a Saviour to believe in, and such a Master to serve.

You shall have honour, dear friends, *among your fellow-Christians*. If you really honour your Master's name alone, it will not be long before they will honour and esteem you. I notice that, the moment a man begins to seek honour for himself, he loses the esteem of his fellows. Do you ever hear any minister who preaches very grandly? If so, you think to yourself, "What a splendid preacher he is!" But you will find that, as a rule, God's people do not care much about him. Notice any worker in the church who wants to be very prominent, and push himself forward; everybody desires to kick him; but there is another brother who serves Christ in the rear rank, and who blushes when he is pushed to the front, he is the man to whom his brethren and sisters look up, and though they may say little to him, they delight to honour him in their hearts. Perhaps the most honourable thing in Christ's house is the door-mat; when all the brethren wipe their dirty boots upon it, they are so much the cleaner.

I know some people who do not like to be in the position of the door-mat; if a person brushes against them, they cry, "What a shame!" It is a great honour to do anything for your Master's children which will be for their good. In the kingdom of God, the way to go up is to go down, and the way to grow great is to grow little. Look at little Paul,—that man short of stature, and with many infirmities. Why, he is the biggest of all the apostles! And what is "great Paul"? Oh! he is only sounding brass; and the less we hear of him, the better. Get to be like little Paul, brother, and your sound shall go out to the very ends of the earth; whereas, if you are ever a big Paul, you will only give out a brazen note which will be heard for a very little way. If the Lord Jesus Christ has made us to be his servants, let us count it our highest honour to be a servant of the least of his servants that so we may bless them and glorify him.

But *our highest honour is yet to come*, in that day when Christ shall call his chosen ones to his own right hand to reign with him, when he shall appoint unto them a kingdom even as his Father appointed it to him, when he who was faithful in a few things shall be made ruler over many things in the kingdom of the Master for ever and for ever. I think I see the King come into his court; it is crowded with cherubim and seraphim and all the shining ones that form his royal retinue. There they stand in all their gorgeous glory, and the Master, from the throne, looks over all their ranks as he accepts their loyal and reverent homage. But he is looking for one poor man who on earth loved him, and who kept the faith under much derision and scorn; at last he spies him out, and says, "Make way, my angelic servants, cherubim and seraphim, stand in line, and let him come. This man was with me in my humiliation, as you could not be; for me he bore the cross, and was despised; make way, and let him come and sit with me, for they who have been with me in my humiliation shall be with me in my glory."

Oh, that you and I, dear friends, may have that honour at the last! And what will we do when we get it? Why, we will cast our crowns at our Saviour's feet, and say unto him, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the praise and glory for ever," and in that very deed we shall find the highest honour of all, and we shall then, perhaps, recollect this Thursday evening, and this text, "He that waiteth on his master shall be honoured." The Lord bless you all, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

MATTHEW XXV. 14—30.

Verse 14. *For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.*

This parable has to do with you who are professors of Christianity. He "called *his own servants*," those who, by their own consent, were numbered amongst his household servitors: "He called his own servants, and

delivered unto them *his goods*." Not theirs, but his; and therefore to be used for him. If you are Christ's servant, your abilities are his, he has lent them to you to be employed for your Lord. "He called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods."

15. *And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.*

He is gone; our Lord has risen; and we, his servants, are left behind to trade with his goods for his glory.

16—18. *Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.*

We are grieved to know that there are persons with five talents, and others with two talents, who do as this man did; but the case is put in this way, so as to reach us all. Since most persons have but one talent, they are the most often found each one saying, "I have so little ability, I will not do anything. If I had five talents, I might become distinguished; if I had two, I might be very useful; but with one, I need not attempt anything. I am a private person,—a mother, quite obscure, with my little family around me, what can I do?" It is very often a strong temptation from Satan, to those who have but one talent, to make them think that they may, with impunity, hide that one. And then, you see, the argument cuts the other way. If it be wrong to hide one talent, much more wrong is it to hide two, and far worse to dig in the earth, and bury five.

19. *After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.*

Always remember the reckoning. We have heard of one, who went into a house of entertainment, and fed most luxuriously; but, when the landlord brought him the bill, he said, "Oh, I never thought of that!" And there are many who spend their whole lives without ever thinking of the reckoning; yet it must come, and for every hour, for every opportunity, for every ability, for every sin, and for every omission of duty, they must give account. "The lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them."

20, 21. *And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

I do not doubt that this man had often reckoned with himself,—for he that never reckons with himself may well be afraid of being called to reckon with his God;—and I expect that he had often grieved to think that he had not turned the five talents into twenty. He must have thought that, to gain only five talents more, was very little; but he found his master was well content with what he had done. Do you think, brother, that all of you who have five talents have gained five talents more? You were richly endowed as a youth; have you increased the ability to serve your God? You see, the parable speaks not so much of what they had done for other people, as of what they had themselves gained, and still had in hand. Have you more grace? Have you more tact? Have you more adaptation to your Master's service? Are you conscious that it is so? I should not wonder if you are mourning that you are not more useful, and more fit to be used. It is well that you should mourn in that way; but when your Master comes, I trust that he will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

22, 23. *He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents : behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy lord.*

That is a beautiful reward,—not so much to have a joy of our own as to enter into the joy of our Lord. It is not a servant's portion that is given to us ; it is the Master's portion shared by his servants. How it ennobles Christian work to feel that it is not simply our work, but work done by the Master through the servant ; and the reward shall not so much be our joy as our entrance into our Master's joy. That is indeed giving to us the best of the best in return for our poor service here.

24, 25. *Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed : and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine.*

"I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." See, friends, how fear may often be the mother of presumption. Confidence in God begets holy fear ; but unholy fear begets a doubt of God, and leads us to desperate rebellion of unbelief. God save us from such fear !

26, 27. *His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed : thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury.*

His lord took him on his own ground, and condemned him out of his own mouth.

28, 29. *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance :*

He that has faith shall have more faith. He that has a secret taste for heavenly things shall have a greater love for them. He that has some understanding of the truth of God shall get more understanding of it. God gives to those that have ; it is equally true that he gives to those who confess that they have not.

29. *But from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*

If you want an instance of taking away from a man what he has not got, you may have seen it sometimes in the case of a person without any education or knowledge, who is quite content to remain in that condition. But, on a sudden, he is introduced into learned society ; he hears what educated people have to say, and he exclaims, "What a fool I am !" What he thought he had, though he never had it, suddenly goes from him.

30. *And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

If we give any description of the world to come which is at all terrible, those who reject the Scriptures begin to cry out that we have borrowed it from Dante, or taken it from Milton ; but I take leave to say that the most awful and harrowing descriptions of the woes of the lost that ever fell from human lip do not exceed or even equal the language of the loving Christ himself. Listen : "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." He is the true lover of men's souls who does not deceive them. He that paints the miseries of hell as though they were but little is seeking to murder men's souls under the pretence of being their friend. May God give all of you grace to trust in Jesus for yourselves, and then to point others to him, for Christ's sake ! Amen.