

THE MINISTRY OF SMALL THINGS

Matthew 10:42

"And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Matthew 10:42.

In His preaching and teaching it was the custom of our Lord to use the simplest things of life to teach His sublimest lessons. Whether His audience was one of philosophers or peasants, He used the most remarkable simplicity in His message. It seems that He felt there was the possibility of some unlearned person being in His audience, so He spoke only in that language which could be comprehended by the simplest man in all the company. Among the subjects which He used most pointedly were bread and water--those most essential elements in human life. On one occasion He said, "I am the bread of life." John 4:13-14.

When Christ said, "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward," He taught one of the most sublime lessons of all His career as a teacher. This lesson on "The Ministry of Small Things" was one which the disciples needed at that particular time more than any other He could have taught them. It is one which we need today as much as the disciples needed it nineteen centuries ago.

Whatever Christ taught or mentioned is always worthy of our most careful consideration. This is the only reference in the Bible to a cup of cold water, but our Lord glorified it and made the giving of it to a thirsty traveler something worthy of divine reward.

There is more to this "cup of cold water" than appears on the surface. In eastern lands the water is drawn from a well in the court, or else brought from a distance. The housewife usually provides the day's supply in the morning and lets it stand ready for use as it is needed. As the day advances the water gets warm. It would be an easy thing for her to give a cup of this water to a thirsty person, but "a cup of cold water" suggests the kindly thought that she took the trouble to run to the well to draw a fresh drink. Too often we give tepid water to save ourselves trouble. But you will note that Christ indicated it is the "cup of cold water" that calls for the reward.

It is important to distinguish between salvation and rewards. Salvation is a gift from God, which cannot be earned, whereas, rewards are given to us as a result of the service which we render after we have been saved. Only Christians can earn rewards. To the children of God His Word says, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Hebrews 6:10.

God's Word plainly says that salvation is a present possession. We do not have to wait until we get to heaven to discover whether or not we are saved. According to the Saviour, Christians have passed from death unto life. In John 5:24 He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." We have been saved from our sins, therefore, we shall never come into judgment to see if we are fit for heaven. However, rewards will not be given until the return of Christ. Revelation 22:12 says, "And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." When He comes, our reward will be in exact proportion to the service we have rendered. If we have been faithful, great will be the reward. If we have been unfaithful, and have little to show for the years we have professed His Name, then we shall not receive a reward.

Is it right for Christians to look for rewards as a result of doing His service? Should they not serve Him out of sheer gratitude and without thought of what might come to them in the end? In case you think that rewards are an unworthy motive, may I remind you that they loomed large in the ministry of Christ. He often promised them, as our text indicates.

Our Saviour offered them for our encouragement and inspiration. Many times Christians miss the blessedness which comes from thinking of that wonderful place called "the judgment seat of Christ."

John four brings out the clear distinction between salvation and rewards, and also sets forth our Lord's endorsement of rewards. As He sat by Jacob's well, He offered salvation to the Samaritan woman as a gift, which is something that multitudes today say cannot be received in this manner. Then, in verse thirty-six, Christ said, "And he that reapeth receiveth wages." Salvation is obtained by the simple act of faith, while rewards come as wages for service rendered. We get into heaven by an act of God through Christ, but our position in heaven is determined by our acts on earth as Christians. If we are faithful reapers, great will be our wages.

These are days when we are given numerous opportunities for rendering Christian service. We may or may not be capable of doing great things, but it is not to those that our text is drawing our attention. Rather, it directs our attention to that which is small and simple and commonplace. The Master said, "a cup of cold water only." This is not considered expensive, and yet how valuable it is, especially when it is needed very much. This expression certainly suggests a human need. No human can do without water. Regardless of the generation to which one belongs he always has this need. Whenever man has found himself without water he has been conscious of his need, and realized how precarious his situation. Then, just as man must have water to quench his physical thirst, even so must he have something to quench the thirst of his soul. Our text not only suggests a need, but also a satisfaction. It would be much worse should one feel his spiritual need and had nowhere to go to get that need supplied.

This verse is a kind of poor man's charter. It is the guarantee of his right to a place in the service of Christ. He may not be able to do much, or to give much, but at least he can give a cup of cold water, and know that his deed will count in the sight of the Lord. If you cannot feed the hungry, heal the sick, or raise the dead, there is one thing that you can do--you can give a cup of cold water as a disciple, and in that event you will not lose your reward. You can do that. Never mind how small and insignificant that may be, do it as a disciple; do it without apology; do it in Christ's name; and you will receive a reward.

Smiles must have played across the faces of the disciples when Christ spoke this text to them, for He thereby injected hope in them. There was something before them which they could do. He taught them the first important lesson in Christian service, that of the ministry of the small things that are right at hand, whatever they are. If you would be successful in your service for the One Who has saved you, do not pine because you cannot do what He did, or what some other person has done. Always remember what He wants you to do is to seize the thing that is nearest at hand, which humanity needs, and use it for the glory of God and the salvation and welfare of people. Immeasurable joy and blessing come to those who serve others in the name of Christ.

Our Lord put a premium on faithfulness in service. He continually stressed the nobility and worth of fidelity. He delighted to call attention to some unrecognized ministry and to commend some faithful, though unknown, worker. The poor, afflicted, shrinking woman who touched the hem of His garment received His approval. The lone widow who gave into the Lord's treasury her two mites was observed and commended by Him Who looks upon the heart and judges motives rather than deeds alone. Christ declared that even "a cup of cold water" given in the name of a disciple would not go unrewarded.

Let us look into this matter a little more in detail, and see how a Christian may gain a full reward. If a Christian wants all that God has planned for him in the way of reward, he should be:

I. Walking In the Truth.

If one departs from the teachings of God's Word, it is utterly impossible to gain a full reward. The Saviour stipulated that which we are to give to others as being "a cup of cold water," not a dose of poison. You will recall that "water" is used throughout the Scriptures as a symbol of the life-giving Word itself. Any adulteration of the message of the Word, therefore, is tantamount to injecting poison into the cup.

Many deceivers have gone forth, but with these and their errors we must not keep company, nor bid them Godspeed. Frequently somebody will say, "I don't think it matters so much what we believe as it does how we act and what we do." But God Does not agree with any such idea. He lays great stress on doctrine and the mighty truths He reveals concerning Himself. Outward expression always finds its motive in hidden thought. In other words, our conduct is regulated by our beliefs. If we do not believe what God says, then it stands to reason that we will not do what He commands. Instead, we will follow our own desires and feelings, and by so doing we will deprive ourselves of a "full reward."

II. Working According To His Will.

The children of Israel had a zeal for God. They were very active in forms and ceremonies. They prayed, they fasted, they gave tithes, but none of it was according to knowledge. They were not within the circle of the will of God for them. To be outside the circle of His will is to be in the pathway of disobedience. Such disobedience is a sharp knife that whittles away at a "full reward." One must know the will of God and live accordingly. The Bible makes much of God's will, and there is nothing in the universe as great as being in the center of His will. Remember that God will never reward His servants for doing what is contrary to His will.

III. Withdrawing From The World.

Because worldliness is such a great detriment to God's people, He wants them to live the separated life. God knows the harm of sinful pleasures and how deeply they cut into the heart life of His people and literally sap their spirituality. More Christians become backslidden through worldliness than anything else, with the result that the life is wasted, time is lost, work remains undone, and God is dishonored.

IV. Waiting In Yieldedness.

We should wait in yieldedness before Him so that the Holy Spirit can accomplish through us those things which are pleasing to God. God wants an opportunity to do His own work, but He has ordained that His people shall be the channels through which He shall minister. His voice can only be heard through the lips of people like us. Hence the importance of putting ourselves completely at His disposal.

V. Winning Of Souls.

How can we expect a "full reward" if we fail at this point, when soul-winning is the principle phase of Christian service? While we want to win souls to Christ because we want to show our gratitude to Him, and because we want to help others, it is not an unworthy thing to keep the bright reward in view. Rewards in terms of crowns proved to be a most valuable incentive for Paul to strive to his utmost in this holy business. How sad it would be to stand in the presence of Christ in that

coming day of accountability and not have one sheaf to cast at His feet! On the other hand, the happiest moment any Christian could have would be on that same day to present to Him many precious souls won as a result of faithfulness to Him and to duty. We will be rewarded for the faithful performance of the task assigned to us by our Lord.

You have often heard people remark about a feather being in one's hat. Such words for giving honor where it is due grew out of the once almost universal custom of adding a feather to one's headgear for every enemy killed. The American Indians did this until feathers were trailing down their backs. History records that when "Chinese" Gordon, the famous English soldier, quelled a rebellion, he was honored by the Chinese government with a yellow jacket and a peacock feather.

It is not feathers in our caps or hats that we desire, but, as it were, stars in our crowns, the full reward that He longs to give us as His followers. How blessed it will be in that day to hear our Master say to us, "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." Matthew 25:23.