

THE MINISTRY OF SMALL THINGS

"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.

People have the inclination to underestimate the value of little things. It is the big things that attract their attention. They are striving constantly to break all previous records--to run faster, to swim farther, to fly higher and to build bigger than anyone else has ever done before. They have never realized that life is not a little bundle of big things, but a big bundle of little things.

Because of this disposition to depreciate the small things, the little kindnesses that might be rendered to others as we pass along the highway of life are neglected. We overlook opportunity after opportunity to do little deeds of kindness, to speak a word of good cheer, to lend a helping hand, and to lift on the load that weighs another down. It is not because we do not want to help, but because we are deceived by the illusion that the little which we might do is not worth the doing. We assume an air of indifference and are disposed to ignore the small deeds of kindness we might do each day.

We carry this spirit into our religious life. It is the big thing for Christ that we are always trying to do, while the little things which are at our hands ready to be done escape our notice. These little things slip into the non-value column and are pushed aside as worthless. Tragically we seem to think that, if we cannot find something big to do, it is not worth while to try to do anything at all, so we fall into the ranks of the useless and cumber the ground rather than help the Lord.

Our Lord placed great emphasis on little things. After He had selected His twelve apostles, He took them up on the mountain for the purpose of giving them certain instructions for their life work. These instructions were in the nature of an exemplification of certain Christian principles which were to govern them in their lives and teachings. Following this Sermon on the Mount, He brought them down into the valley, where they again came in contact with all types of human need. In every instance our Lord met that need. After He had met the various needs of the people, He then proceeded to tell how this condition of need could be prevented. The apostles had been called to follow Christ, and they were anxious to do it, but when they saw Him at work cleansing the leper, healing the sick and casting out demons, they were discouraged. They realized that, although He had commissioned them to do these wonderful works, they did not have the ability in themselves to do them. Recognizing their discouragement, Christ spoke the words of our text: "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." I can hear those men say, "We can do that, We cannot do these things that He has done, but we can do that."

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 a lesson which we need today as much as they needed it in their day. This verse is a guarantee of every man's 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 feel that his deed will count in the eyes of the Lord.

Whereas the world called His followers "disciples," Christ called them "little ones," which was an expression of personal endearment. Christ thought of the ones who were in need as individuals and not as a group. The service to be rendered them is a personal one. We are to give the cup of cold water to an individual with our own hands and not through an agent of any kind. One reason why so many church members are no happier in their religious life is because they do so little personal service. This kind of service is something

that anyone can do, but few of us have the ability or the opportunity to do great things. The true value of any service is to be measured by its motive. A common deed becomes an uncommon service if it is done from the right motive.

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.

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 this need, and realized how precarious his situation. Then, just as man must have water to quench his physical thirst, even so much 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 our 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.

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.

If a Christian wants all that God has planned for him in the way of reward, he should be walking in the truth, working according to God's will, withdrawing from the world, waiting in yieldedness and winning souls. 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.