

THE PITCHER BEARER

Mark 14:13-16

Christ Jesus is the central figure in any situation in which He appears. This is true in the passage of scripture which is about to claim our attention. At the same time, our Lord gives us a glimpse of one of those unnamed and unknown persons who appear at intervals in the four Gospels. Let us now turn our attention to this man whom Christ had noticed as he traveled back and forth through the village. He was a nameless pitcher bearer, but a man who was so faithful in the performance of his little duties that Christ predicated the progress of His work upon his being at the right place at the right time.

The experience of this unnamed man, if it were a single instance, would be insignificant and unimportant. But, because the experience of this nameless pitcher bearer is so peculiarly like yours and mine, it becomes an incident of unusual moment.

As Christ had gone up and down the dusty camel and donkey trails, in and out of the crooked, crowded and narrow streets of the towns where He visited, He had noticed this faithful servant going about his duties. Evidently he was a man without position, without property, without prestige, and without any social influence, but with a quality so desirable that it not only attracted the attention of Christ, but He used it as the foundation for an institution He intended to build in the hearts of His followers.

Speaking to His disciples, Christ said, "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water." He did not give them any instruction as to what they should do if, perchance, this servant felt that he had already done his part. Christ simply told them that they would meet a man bearing a pitcher of water. That quality of utter reliability in the life of a servant in those days, as in our day, was so rare that it stood out like a flower in the cranny of a garden wall. Subsequent Christian history has proven beyond doubt the great importance of the meeting that our Lord was planning for that night in the upper room.

Our Lord sent Peter and John to make arrangements for the use of the guestchamber, in which He intended to eat the passover with His disciples and, later, to institute the Lord's Supper. He instructed them to approach the "goodman of the house" and ask him to inform him as to the whereabouts of the guestchamber in which they were going to eat the passover. This translation "guestchamber" would indicate a common eating-room, as in an inn. Our Lord, Who never demanded for Himself the best things of this life, did not ask of this man anything more than a very ordinary place for His purpose. Knowing this goodman, and anticipating his open-handed hospitality, He knew that he would give him the very best that he had. One of the distinctive and outstanding traits of this unnamed friend was his gracious hospitality.

It would seem that this man, who owned the house in which the upper room was located, was a follower of Christ. It is quite possible that the Master had been a guest under that roof on various former occasions, and that the owner had insisted that He feel free to use this room whenever He wished to do so. He cheerfully gave Christ the best room in his house. It is a true disciple who gives Christ his best, which, of course, is what He deserves. The best that he had for Christ was "a large upper room furnished and prepared." That is what our Lord wants of us. He wants the large upper room of each of our lives, furnished with all the capacities of our unique personality. He wants all of those aptitudes and powers of which we are the possessors.

This incident is a wonderful illustration of the fact that Christ accepts that which love presents to Him for His use and disposal. No one ever says to Him, "Lord, take my life," Whose life He does not take, bless and use. No guestchamber is offered to Him with all the sincerity of a loving heart which He hesitates to accept, occupy and use.

It took a brave man to do what the owner of the upper room did. Nothing was so unpopular at Jerusalem as to be connected with Christ. The rulers were hoping to put Him to death. They

had issued the command that, if any man knew where He was, he should tell them in order that they might seize Him. To have any friendly connections with Christ, or to harbor Him, was to run the risk of being put out of the synagogue, becoming the object of public contempt, and perhaps meeting with a sudden and violent death. Therefore, careful men closed their doors against Christ, and argued that they could not afford to expose their families to such peril. In spite of this, the owner of the upper room possessed the brand of courage which made him willing to entertain the Saviour.

In all probability this nameless man could not preach a sermon, or teach a class. So far as we know, he was not gifted in soul-winning. He was not a worker of miracles. He was not cut out for such things. But he could open his house to the Saviour, and give Him his best room for His own use, and he gladly did so. He stands out as a conspicuous example of faith, courage, love and devotion. Somehow and somewhere he had come in contact with Christ, and had come to know Him, and had learned to appreciate and love Him. There is no basis for doubting that he was a disciple of Christ or that he delighted to obey Him.

Christ was well acquainted with the ways of this man's household. How do we know this? Well, He said to His disciples, "Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him." This was an unusual thing for a man to be doing. Carrying pitchers of water was ordinarily the work of the women of the household. He wanted His disciples to know that, if they would follow this pitcher bearer, he would lead them to the house of one of His friends, and he would receive them in His blessed name.

In the story of the pitcher bearer certain significant lessons are set forth clearly.

I. There Is A Place For Every Person.

It is heartening beyond expression to know that no matter how lacking in talent, how impoverished of ability, somewhere in the Master's plan for life, there is a place for every person. Who would have thought that of all the people whom He knew, those with possessions, position, prominence, prestige and power, Christ would select a servant, a man whose chief task was bringing water from the village well? This nameless pitcher bearer inspires every man and woman, whether they be five-talent, two-talent, or one-talent people, to bring whatever talents they may have and lay them at the feet of Christ and say, in the language of our old hymn:

"Take my life and let it be,
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

Perhaps somebody will ask, "If there is a place for me in the divine plan, then how am I to find it?" We find the help which is needed here in the Scriptures. It is a progressive plan. All of the people who have dedicated their lives to Christ and lived for Him have passed along this way. There was never any doubt in the mind of the Apostle Paul, for example, when He met Christ on the road to Damascus and the Lord separated him and set him apart for a great place of service in His kingdom, that it was the voice of God that spoke to him and the hand of the Lord that grasped him. Of that event Paul said, "Whereupon, oh, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."

God has a plan for every life. There are some people to whom it never occurs that God has a plan for their lives. They simply draw their own little shabby patterns of life. They outline the boundaries of their living. In far too many cases, they are bounded on the north and south by supply and demand and on the east and west by profit and loss, and inside of that little narrow world they have one philosophy, which usually is, "Gimme mine. Gimme mine." There is no church, school, orphanage, hospital or eleemosynary institution so far as they are concerned. They simply live inside of their little, narrow, selfish worlds and finally go down to their graves, "unwept, unhonored, and unsung."

There is also a second classification, into which many people fall. They are the ones who acknowledge that there is an overshadowing providence, that there is a divine plan, but they have plans for themselves that are not consistent with the divine plan. Rebellious against God's will and resisting the Holy Spirit, they turn their backs to the high road and go their own wilful ways. One man entered the Christian ministry and started upon a very promising career. Ere long, he yielded to the temptation to use his business ability for his own selfish ends. He quit the work of the ministry and became an eminently successful business man. Later, one of his intimate friends was visiting him in his palatial home and asked, "How are you getting along?" He replied, "Well, I am making a lot of money. But if there is any unhappier man, more miserable man, in this city that I am, I don't know who he is." There are millions of people who thwart God's plan for their lives by superimposing their own selfish purposes on the divine will.

Then, there is a third class. It is smaller, but happier by far, walking the high road, with the sunshine of an eternal morning falling across their pathways. These are they who, in perfect surrender, after the fashion of Fanny Crosby's great old hymn, have said:

"Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight."

These are they who have set their living to the tune of that grand old song:

"I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
O'er mountain, or plain, or sea;
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord,
I'll be what you want me to be."

When God's plan is followed, it leads to that high level of which Thomas Carlyle spoke when he said, "Blessed is the man who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness."

II. Every Person Should Be In His Place At The Right Time.

This nameless pitcher bearer made his contribution to the success of the divine plan by being at the right place at the proper time. In the unswerving fidelity of this servant there is a real lesson for us. How many times ministers sit in their pulpits, look out across empty pews and see in their mind's eye the faces of men and women who have pledged loyalty to Christ, but they are conspicuous by their absence. One sometimes wonders if some people join a church because they want one from which to stay away. Or, is it merely because belonging to a church is respectable. Many church members are seldom, if ever, in their proper places. I am reminded of the young preacher who made an announcement about a funeral service. Knowing that he was leaving the church, he was frankly honest. He said, "The funeral of Mr. Ben Brown will be held from this church tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock. And, Mr. Brown will be here himself, in person, for the first time in three years." It may have sounded a little cruel, but why should we claim for people after they are dead something they never claimed for themselves while they were alive? Being at the right place at the proper time is a quality which is indispensable to the success of the Lord's work.

Work is the heritage, duty and responsibility of all servants of Christ. "To every man his work" is the Lord's method. There is a niche in the Lord's house for each one, and in that niche is just the sort of work each is most fitted to do. It is a great privilege and duty to find out what the Lord wants us to do, and then to do it to the very best of our ability without wishing to exchange places with others. In this connection a peculiar human quality frequently reveals itself. If the place is prominent and the position conspicuous, it is not particularly difficult to get somebody to be at the right place at the right time. On the other hand, if the position is in the rear ranks, in the shadows, beyond the reach of the spotlight, far too many are inclined to say, "Let Geroge do it." Keeping in mind that there is a place for each one, Christianity

needs to emphasize the importance of each of us finding his place and filling it to the best of his ability.

An important rehearsal for a great oratorio was in progress, Sir Michael Costa conducting. The voices of the chorus filled the building, and the thunder of the organ, the rolling of the drums, the clear ringing tones of the cornets, the clash of the cymbals, and the beautiful notes of the stringed instruments combined to make splendid harmony. "Stop"! All waited in wondering silence for the conductor's reason for the sudden command. "Where is the piccolo?" he asked.

In all the grand peals of music the conductor missed that tiny note, and the whole was to him imperfect. This incident has a great lesson for us. In the mighty chorus of the service of God's people, the Lord Jesus Christ will miss us, if we are silent and idle.

III. God Requires Every Person To Fill His Place.

It is encouraging to know that God, Who requires every person to fill his place, enables an ordinary person to achieve extraordinary results. This should challenge all of us to do our very best for Him. For every man who has stood on the hilltops of time with palms of victory in his hands there lies in the bosom of Mother Earth the dust of millions but for whose fidelity to a cause the accomplishments of these great ones would have been impossible.

This nameless pitcher bearer performed the little duty assigned to him as though the destiny of humanity depended on his faithful performance. In the light of his experience in discovering that there is a place for every person, that every person should be in his place at the right time, and that God requires every person to fill his place faithfully, let us humbly ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Then, let us discharge the duties assigned to us as though the destiny of humanity depended upon our doing so.