

The unthanked servant

(*Luke 17:7-10*)

“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? and will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

In this parable Jesus is bringing home the truth that man's work for Principle in expressing Principle cannot be spasmodic and confined to certain areas of life, but is continuous and embraces the whole of his experience. He is bringing out that we need to express Principle in two directions — first in Principled consecration of thought to the activity of any particular moment, and then in the acknowledgment that it is Principle which enables us to fulfil that activity.

Ploughing symbolizes pursuing a specific line of activity which demands the straight lines of Spirit in our thought without deviation or any wandering off the clear-cut path. Jesus once said, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,” indicating the necessity of consecrating thought to the work in progress.

Feeding the cattle symbolizes cultivating in our responses to ourselves and to others those outstanding qualities for which Mrs Eddy tells us that the cattle stand — that is, “diligence, promptness, and perseverance” (S&H 514:15-16). Whatever it is that we are doing,

whether helping someone in Science or working in any form of business, we need to feed or nourish our thought with diligence, with careful attention to the matter in hand. Promptness implies being alert and on our toes, ready for whatever may arise; cattle are always right at the gate at milking-time. Perseverance is brought out in the admonition, "Hold thought steadfastly to the enduring, the good, and the true" (S&H 261:4-5).

When we "come from the field" after doing well our work of ploughing or feeding cattle — that is, come to our sense of Principle after being in the "field," or the world, where we feel we have been successfully pursuing a specific line with good results and have also been very patient, for instance, in our responses to others — we have the self-congratulating attitude that we have earned a special reward; but Jesus emphasizes that it is at this moment that Principle requires that we serve Principle by giving it all the praise. Instead of resting on our laurels when we feel we are deservedly coming off duty, we must continue to serve Principle by placing the laurels where they belong — that is, in Principle itself. Two of Jesus' own statements cover the points stressed in this parable — "I do always those things that please Him" and "I can of mine own self do nothing . . . the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works."

If we serve Principle in recognition of what it has done in supplying us with conditions calling for our responses and also with the means of responding, we shall be serving ourselves too with all the sustenance we need, because we shall find rest and renewal in that very recognition. We shall not find recuperation if we think we have done a great deal and are now too tired to think of Principle at all and should be given a special bonus and special treatment. We never tire or have any desire to stop serving Principle if we know that Principle is activating itself through us and that Principle gives us the ability to do what we need to do and respond to others in a Principled way.

When we feel we have done our best and been good or done good, that is the time to ask ourselves what gave us the ability to be or do that good. In other words, we need to serve Principle at this very point. Principle requires of us our recognition of it. It is a necessity

for man because it makes him Principled. If we do give full credit to Principle in every degree, we become Principled because we reflect Principle's own consciousness of unbroken restfulness of activity. Only as we have this sense are we entitled to sit down, as it were, and realize that we are doing no more than what is expected of us, namely, responding to Principle in every way in all the expressions of our being and accepting that our ability to carry out those responses is given us by the very Principle which called upon us in the first place to have those responses in order to be its expression. There is no servitude here, but conscious joy at the privilege of being Principle's expression.

In thinking of the right of reward for work well done, we have only to bear in mind the Biblical statement, "His reward is with Him," which means that as we stay with Him, as we stay as close as we know how to being the expression of Principle, we have the immediate reward of so doing, and therefore we are not *looking* for reward, since we already *have* it. This explains the saying in the parable, "We are unprofitable servants;" in other words, we have not got our eye on the profits nor do we need to, because they are here with us. Doing what we must do in our individual expressions of Principle does not entitle us to any special profit or reward over and above the deep spiritual Soul-satisfaction which is ours in realizing that our whole being is one continuous unbroken activity of expressing or rather being the expression of Principle.

The true servant finds that he has whatever he needs *through* his service to Principle, but his eye is not on that return for service. He has the wrong attitude if he serves Principle with the thought of what it is going to do for him and he also loses thereby the pure joy of realizing the presence of Principle. If, like Mrs Eddy, our desire is to know *Him* nearer and love *Him* more, and we humbly pray to serve *Him* better (see My.174:27-28) and we have "no other gods," we have the right approach. The object of our service is the divine. There is no doubt that if we seek "first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness ... all these things shall be added," for the simple reason that our experience is the state of our consciousness and

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therefore if the state of our consciousness is imbued with the presence of Principle and its perfection as the only Being, "all these things" are bound to be "added." It is not a question of a special reward, but the natural outcome.

If ever we seek a return with the thought, "Look at all I have done that deserves reward," we have destroyed the scientific relationship between God and man, Principle and idea, and so can enjoy no feeling of reward. Our false consciousness of self stops it and we merely carry a greater weight of servitude. We need only come into line with the consciousness which is Love if we want a full and true sense of reward.

The Master must have given this parable because he saw the overall claim in human thought of spasmodic and temporarily scintillating work with an expectancy that this will allow us to rest on our oars or even cease for a period from being what we must continuously be — that is, what Mrs Eddy describes in her poem as a "gentle beam of living Love, And deathless Life" (Po.29:15-16). What we should expect as our own experience is that through the continuous and unbroken expression of qualities of Principle, no matter where we may be — out in the world or in the home, at the beginning or the end of the day — our reward is continuously with us in the deep Soul-satisfaction of instinctive awareness that we are actually being ourselves and all that we want of our true selfhood. There could be nothing jerky or intermittent in Science, for divinely defined it is "the atmosphere of God" (No.9:26), the atmosphere of "tireless Being" (Hea.19:18) in its perpetual expression of itself, undeviating in purpose, and man is "but the humble servant of the restful Mind" (S&H 119:32). Jesus wanted to alert the student to the realization that his whole consciousness when truly seen and responded to is a flow of ceaseless good and Soul-filled happiness and therefore he should expect nothing more and nothing less than this, for it bears within itself the great reward of finding what he is and being it with no break nor any belief that there ever could be a break in the continuity of being.

The acknowledgment of this truth of our being enables us to set

aside the suggestions of mortal thinking along such avenues as belief in retirement in any other sense but the redirection of activity, or belief that we can do just so much and no more in service to Principle, or any other form of mental malpractice which whispers subtly that we can be anything but what we are — namely, God's expression of Himself through us, which means a continual unfolding and expanding experience of good.

Through the acceptance of the truth brought out in this parable we are able to understand why Mrs Eddy makes the demand, "Christian Scientists, be a law to yourselves that mental malpractice cannot harm you either when asleep or when awake" (S&H 442:30-32). We may mistakenly imagine that we are off duty when asleep, but this demand of Mrs Eddy's is actually a loving demand in line with this parable, for it invites us to enjoy the continuity of being by night as well as by day — and thence by months and by years and on to the experience of infinity. Consciousness can never cease being conscious and is a continuous, uninterrupted flow of the realization of good through ourselves and others. We should therefore not accept the suggestion, for instance, that at night we can have bad dreams without wishing to do so. Even if our eyes are closed in the so-called resting hours of sleep, we are in fact still conscious. If we realize that by day we too often allow our thinking to drift into nightmarish channels, we can see how this habit can express itself more freely in the night watches. But the individual who has kept his thought by day to "the straight line of Spirit" (S&H 502:6) — that is, with all reasoning based on the spiritual facts of being — finds that this control continues throughout the entire experience of consciousness. Anyone who will not allow himself to entertain or be influenced during the day by any of the nightmarish or even sensually pleasant dreams of mortal mind (brought to him by the news or by what appear as his own imaginings) will find that he never has a nightmarish experience at any other time during the twenty-four hours of his day. If he suffers a period of distorted dreaming by night and then examines his thinking during the so-called conscious period of his daytime experience, this will reveal that in the ratio that he is actively

at rest in expressing Principle-impelled and Principle-guided thinking during those hours which he regards as his conscious experience he will enjoy the same level of thinking during the so-called unconscious and subconscious times of resting in sleep.

“The consciousness of Truth rests us more than hours of repose in unconsciousness” (S&H 218:7-8), and so the ability is ours to practise that consciousness of Truth in a manner which enables us to be a law to ourselves by day and therefore by night. Nothing but looseness of thinking and being off duty during our waking hours leads to the apparent inability to control our thinking during that other period of consciousness which we call sleep, and so a true and consistent control of thinking by day in service to Principle along the lines of Principle’s direction must and will lead to the same experience during those other hours which we call night. Everyone has to learn the truth expressed in John’s words in Revelation, “there shall be no night there,” and the sooner we realize that it is a natural thing to us and only requires practice to realize that it is natural, the better it will be. Thought controlled by day with the strong and healthy impressions of Truth will find itself controlled by night in the same manner and with the same blessings. Those who already practise this know that in some degree they can be like Jesus, who was sleeping in the stern of the boat on the lake of Galilee but when aroused was immediately able to recognize, rebuke, and destroy the error manifested in the storm.

“The highest and sweetest rest, even from a human standpoint, is in holy work” (S&H 519:28-2), and so we need only define to ourselves what “holy work” is to realize how true are those words; “holy work” must mean what is going on when our thinking is in full submission to the requirements of Principle. Laziness is not rest, and we can find real rest only in a continuance of action in response to God.

What Jesus was calling attention to in this parable is highlighted in a passage in “Miscellaneous Writings” where Mrs Eddy speaks of “the divine intelligence, or Principle, of all real being; holding man forever in the rhythmic round of unfolding bliss, as a living witness to

and perpetual idea of inexhaustible good” (82:31-4). Continuity of Principled thinking and a due recognition of its source is a necessity of our being and can therefore be practised by anyone in earnest.