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## THE ONE THING NEEDFUL.

LUKE x. 38-42.—But one thing is needful; etc.

“**N**OW it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.” The first visit this, and by invitation, to a family, from that time held in high esteem by the Master. Martha was at the head of the family: it was her house: she received him: and, as his hostess, she intended to manifest her hospitality, by a very handsome entertainment. That there was any vanity in this, we are not informed; but, in

many cases, there is as much anxiety to make a display of resources and taste, as to testify kindness and respect. But it is not always so; and perhaps this case was one of the exceptions. However this might have been, Martha was cumbered about much serving. This was the part she had chosen. The wondrous Lord, who was attracting so much attention, whose fame was spreading through the land, whom many held to be the Messiah, who was regarded by herself as more than man, Lord, the Lord of Israel, was under her roof, and she wished to make his entertainment worthy of him and of herself. The honor of her house was in question, and demanded the taxing of all her resources and skill. She was cumbered, careful, troubled. She chose to be so. She assumed such part as suitable to the occasion and to herself.

“And she had a sister called Mary—” whose ideas of the incident were very different: and therefore she chose a part, adopted a course, very different indeed from that of her worthy, industrious, generous sister. “She sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word.” Here was an opportunity of hearing one who had the word of eternal life. Here was one with a message from heaven; at least, a prophet; perhaps, the Messiah. What had he to say? She must sit at his feet, and hear his word. And when she began to hear, she could not depart from his teaching: it became more and more interesting: she saw instinctively, that he preferred teaching to feasting; and she felt that her everlasting interests were suspended upon what he taught. She had been accustomed to support her sister’s housewifery, as seems intimated by the latter’s surprise and the appeal. But she was sure that the Lord approved her conduct; something in his look, his manner, and “a still small voice” in her heart assured her of this: and she remained at her post. She had chosen this part. She had elected to entertain this unusual guest, in this, to her, unusual manner.

“Dost thou not care,” said the overburdened Martha to the Lord, “that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.” In her view, the kind-hearted woman saw the honor of the house and the comfort of the Lord, imperilled by the unusual defection of Mary; and seeing the latter’s earnest attention to his word, she requests that he will direct the delinquent’s attention to her duty.

It must have surprised her exceedingly; possibly, she was much benefitted by the discovery; when she learned from his own lips, that it was by far more agreeable to him to instruct, to enlighten, to bless, to save herself and family; than to be sumptuously entertained: that he came “not to be ministered unto, but to minister:” not to possess earthly pomp and luxury, but “to lay down his life” for sinners: not to be a receiver, but a giver: to teach, that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” All Martha’s care and trouble was kindly meant, but was a mistake; it was not needful; he and his disciples needed rest and refreshment; but did not need all the array that Martha was preparing so busily and anxiously. Something plain, simple, that would not require much toil and time in preparing, and would allow the family time to listen to the Great Teacher, was the demand of the occasion.

The one needful thing, in comparison of all others, was to hear the word of the divine guest, and become wise unto salvation. This is the *sine qua non*: the real need of every one; the great end of life, and it should be life’s object and aim. The life is more than meat. Sustenance is needful for the body; but the “word” is needful for the soul: the soul is more than the body: feasting sumptuously is rather hurtful than needful to the body; and is by no means helpful to the soul. The one thing needful, then, is to hear the word of Jesus, and obey it; conform to it. We do not suppose that

our Lord meant to signify, that there was need of only one dish, or article of food ; but, while he intimated that Martha was unnecessarily careful and troubled ; he signified to her that the one great necessity of the hour, was to take advantage of his presence, by sitting at his feet, and receiving his instruction. Here was the fountain of blessing. To hang garlands upon it, is not the way to honor it ; but to receive the precious outpouring, drinking and praising the living water. A general is not honored by the acclamation of his troops, as by their attention and obedience to his orders. The prophet puts into the mouth of the Messiah these words ; "I delight to do thy will, O God : " and that will was human salvation : and when he, Jesus, the Messiah came to do that will, the "one thing needful" for him, and for sinners, was to let him do it ; to "sit at his feet and hear his word : " for "faith comes by hearing ; and hearing, by the word of God ; " and "by faith are ye saved : " "he that believeth shall be saved."

This was the good part, Mary had chosen ; and our Lord declined to interrupt her in it. She, in her choice, had exhibited a wisdom superior to that of her sister, her senior in years ; by her more accurate opinion of the character, pleasure, wishes of their distinguished guest. To please him, was not to prepare for him an entertainment, to the full extent of their household and personal resources ; but to give him an opportunity to bless and save them all. When a statesman proposes a plan for great good to the public ; the need and wisdom of the day, is not to feast and praise the statesman, but the adoption and trial of his plan. So with the Saviour ; it is not the one thing needful, to erect magnificent churches, under pretense of honoring him ; but to hear and obey his word. If our resources are large, "to visit the widows and fatherless in their afflictions, and keep ourselves unspotted from the world."

## WHICH LORD COMMENDED?

LUKE xvi. 8.—“And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”

PERHAPS it is the general opinion, that the lord here referred to, is the lord of the unjust steward. Some of the best commentators so affirm, with an “of course,” as if there is no room to doubt; while our translators, by not using a capital letter at the beginning of the word, indicate their harmony with such an interpretation. Yet, we cannot accept it: as it appears to be founded only upon the impropriety, of regarding our Lord as commending a fraud. But where is the propriety of agreeing, that the lord of the steward would commend his servant’s fraud; when he had just reprehended him for that very fault; ordered him to bring in his account; and made known to him, that he intended to dismiss him from his office? The master was a worldly man, and seeking his own interest; and so was the steward: possibly had the latter cheated some other than his lord, and thus made up, or more than made up, the waste he had been guilty of; he might have looked upon *such* procedure as *wise*; and have gladly retained him in his service. But, it was not very consistent, to have called him to account, in process of dismissal, for his *commendable* trickiness: as if his tricks were no longer censurable, but commendable, when carried on to such a degree, as to injure him much more seriously. This lord must have been a very peculiar man, to have enjoyed this artful and perfidious conduct, on the part of a man, who had already injured him so inexcusably. And further, the reason assigned for the commending, is so singular: “for the children

of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The children of this world ; those persons who act on worldly principle, self-interest, wisely commend the man who takes care of himself at their expense. But this looks like very questionable wisdom : especially in a man, who had sense enough, to reprimand such conduct in his employee, and dismiss him from his position.

But, admitting this view, it does not vindicate our Lord from commending the conduct of the steward. What else is his meaning in the very next verse? "And I say unto YOU, (his disciples, pupils,) Make to YOURSELVES friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," etc. This instruction in such connection, must certainly be understood as commending the example of the steward in *some* respect. When, on another occasion, he had pointed them to the chiefs, the rulers, who were exercising "lordship ;" he did not say, And I direct YOU to secure for YOURSELVES lordship : but he said, It shall not be so among YOU. In this case, on the contrary, he says, in amount, it shall be so also among YOU : and, certainly this is equivalent to a commendation of the steward.

It is more consistent, we think, to accept this eighth verse, as a parenthesis of the narrator, Luke, inserted at the end of the parable, and immediately preceding his resumed account of our Lord's discourse at the ninth verse : a method occasionally used by the sacred writers. It may suffice to cite *Acts* i. 4, "And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." Here the words "*saith he*," in italics, are interpolated by the translators, to indicate and bridge over the abrupt

transition from the Evangelist's own to the words of the Saviour; a transition of which Luke gives no intimation; leaving the reader to his own inference. Indeed nothing could be more sudden, and unexpected, than the change made by Luke, from a continuous narration of the substance of our Lord's address to his disciples, to his very words; as may easily be seen by omitting the words "*saith he*" from the passage. So *Acts* xvii. 2, 3, "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." Here again Luke passes from his own, to Paul's words without any notice whatever.

Both these examples are from the writings of Luke, from whose gospel alone we have the parable of the unjust steward: at the close of which occurs, as we think, the transition from the words of Luke, to those of our Lord as we find the record, at verses 8, 9, of *Luke* xvi.

Then the point of commendation would be this. The steward, in his generation, *i. e.* not looking beyond the grave; he being a child "of *this* world;" made provision (the force of *phronimoos epoieesen*) for "this world;" the short arc on the circle of infinity which measured his vision, its two termini being the cradle and the grave; for this, his theoretic all-life, he made provision; as his own worldly principle required him to do: he was consistent.

But, the "children of light," those who have come out from the darkness of the world, into "the light," the "marvellous light of the gospel," should imitate this steward in making provision for *their* entire life; which they understand as not being a short arc on the circle of infinity, but infinity itself; so extended, as to dwindle

*this life* into a mere point: and yet many children of light, forgetting the facts of their generation, use the mammon of unrighteousness, worldly means, riches, as though they related to this life only, and had no relation to the endless life; employing them to obtain worldly comfort, position, etc., here; and not so as to enhance their welcome into "the everlasting habitations." This was the lesson: as this steward did not wish to be destitute in the years that were between him and the grave; the boundary of his short, worldly vision; so take care to imitate this one feature, providence, in his bad character; and be interested and busy, making provision for your life, which you believe will be eternal; and so use worldly means, possessions, as to aid you in this respect.

As to the phraseology "the Lord," as applied to the Master by Luke, we see it in x. 1., "— the Lord appointed other seventy also," etc.; as well as in other passages. There can be no dispute about that. But in the parable the word lord is used with reference to the "certain rich man," by the steward invariably with the pronoun *my*: "my lord taketh away," etc.; "— owest thou unto my lord," etc. While our Lord in the only use he makes of the word, qualifies it by the pronoun *his*; "his Lord." All this is definite. The Steward's "my lord," and the Master's "his lord," referred to the same person, the proprietor, the "certain rich man." But Luke's "the Lord" does not refer to the proprietor. If this eighth verse was uttered by our Lord, it is most likely we should have had his reiterated "his lord;" which would have been unambiguous.

## THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE xvi. 19-31.

TO understand this Scripture, it is well to consider, that our Lord had been discoursing on riches, covetousness, the impossibility of serving God AND mammon. The Pharisees derided him, (*exemukteerizon auton*, a phrase expressive of contempt,) for they had very different ideas of the relation of religion and riches, from those of our Lord. His was new teaching to them. From the days of Job down, the orthodox view of the Jews was, that wealth and health indicated piety, the favor of God; while poverty and sickness marked impiety and the divine displeasure. So, Job's friends thought it their duty, to treat him as a detected sinner, and therefore punished. They admitted that they were not personally cognizant of his wickedness; that he had managed to keep up a fair show of piety; but they urged that the all-penetrating eye had discovered his iniquities, and they insisted on his confession and reformation. Job resisted this charge; and, while acknowledging his nothingness in comparison with God, maintained his integrity; bemoaning the bitterness of his condition; inasmuch as, while he was known of God to be a sincerely pious man, his poverty and disease showed that he was treated as a sinner. That same poverty and disease convinced his friends that he *was* a sinner; and therefore the punishment, which was his due.

The Pharisees who had sneered so contemptuously at our Lord, held the same doctrine; and therefore the parable, to deny this teaching, and to introduce his own.

"There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." V. 19.

Such is the description. Are these specifications of his guilt? Is it sinful to be rich? To be apparelled consistently with one's fortune? To have excellent food, when obtained honestly? It is distinctly recorded that Solomon had all these bestowed upon him, as the reward of his wise piety; and it was not because of "all his glory," that he incurred the divine displeasure; but, his decline in his allegiance to God. Job, "the greatest of all the men of the east," whose "sons feasted in their houses, every one his day, and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them;" was not brought down to destitution, on account of such vast riches; but, to demonstrate that he did not love and honor God, because of the divine bounty. "Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job honor God for nought? Hast thou not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blest the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he hath!" etc. Then, these immense possessions, that made Job the greatest man of the wealthy east, were so evidently of divine bestowment, that he was charged with having received them as hire; and that his reverence for God, was mere pretense, hypocrisy; his real motive being the worldly prosperity conferred upon him, in consequence of his observance of the form of godliness. A false charge; for when his calamities came upon him in swift and fearful succession, one messenger of evil tidings treading upon the heels of another, until the reports came in that he had not a particle of property left, nor son, nor daughter; "then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away;

blessed be the name of the Lord." The charge was proved false. So it was when his health was taken away. And when he had been sufficiently tried, "the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." That is, he sent him greater worldly prosperity than had been taken from him.

We conclude that what is said of him, in this 19th verse, is not to detail the rich man's crimes. True, there is "no other evil spoken of him:" but *is* this evil? We have given clear example that, of itself, it is not: earthly greatness, earthly splendor is not sin: "the greatest of all the men of the east," was described by the Omniscient thus; "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil." *Job* i. 8.

But what is said of him (the rich man) presents him to us, as being precisely the sort of man, who, according to the doctrine of the pharisees, was basking in the smile of God, because of his piety; wealthy and healthy. He is declared to be rich; and the very costly clothing, really royal apparel, was in proof of it: so, also, the fact that he fared sumptuously every day; continuously. The phraseology here employed, is significant of great expense; both the original Greek, and our English rendering. Sumptuous entertainment now and then, is expensive; when frequent, is more costly; but when continuous, the expense must necessarily be prodigious: and there is not the least hint given, that the rich man did not pay all this expense; nor any, that he exhausted, or even diminished his estate. He is represented as dying rich; "the rich man also died, and was buried;" leaving, as we may suppose, and with reason, his wealth unimpaired. The Greek phrase is *euphrainomenos kath' heemeran lamproos*, "LIVING IN JOVIAL SPLENDOR." The Greek beautifully implies, that this worldling not only *indulged himself* in dainty meats, rich wines,

singing, and the other articles of luxury, but that he did all this in an *elegant, sumptuous, and splendid* manner." *Parkhurst*. The man was very rich.

Incidentally, also, his good health is shown: for how could an invalid endure such dressing and feasting? In the very nature of the case, we find it implied that his health must have been as sound and solid as his fortune: there was no giving way in either. So, we have described to us, the pharisees' *beau ideal* of heaven's favorite. Of course, we do not affirm that a rich man cannot be a sinner; as there is nothing in the parable, or elsewhere, to countenance such an idea. All that we suppose in the case, is that our Lord intended to exhibit such a man, as would fairly represent the pharisaic conception of heaven-favored piety. All attempts to find in this 19th verse the specifications of the man's guilt, will be specimens of unsuccessful ingenuity.

"And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover (*alla kai*, yea also) the dogs came and licked his sores." Vv. 20, 21.

Here is the description of Lazarus: somewhat more in detail, than that of the rich man. But, are these the items of his piety? No one has had such a thought. Yet why not? If what is said of the one, be the items of his guilt, why not what is said of the other be the items of his piety? Poverty is not piety. A poor man is often found to be pious, exemplary, irreproachable: but, too frequently, the poor are found to be as destitute of grace as of money. Our Lord was not describing the man's piety; but, his poverty and ill health. He had exhibited the favorite of God, according to pharisaic teaching; and now, by the same light, he presents one on whom was resting God's dark frown, as evidenced by *poverty and disease*.

But now the scene changes. Time ends with both ; and to the amazement of the pharisees, he shows them Lazarus in heaven, the rich man in hell ! He did not agree with them in their teaching. They had already derided him, for his underestimate of riches and health ; what would they think of him now, after having sent the man of riches and health to hell ; the man of poverty and disease to heaven !

And now our Lord introduces, with his accustomed prudence and gentleness his own doctrine of repentance ; without which no one will be saved ; and the sufficiency of the Word of God, the Scriptures, to persuade men to repentance. The parable represents the rich man as having five brethren, on their way to " this place of torment ;" and begs that Lazarus, one from the dead, might be sent unto them, that they might repent : which Abraham declines to do ; as the five had the Scriptures, than which nothing could be more efficient.

From this we see, that the five were in the way to torment, from which repentance was their safeguard : not riches ; not health ; not poverty ; not disease : but, repentance. Then repentance had saved Lazarus : and repentance would have saved the rich man. The rich, the poor, every one must repent : unless ye repent, ye perish : repentance toward God, precedes faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Without repentance salvation is impossible to rich or poor. Riches, poverty, etc., do not designate our standing with God. All men, everywhere are called upon to repent ; nor is the penitent ever rejected.

There are some incidental thoughts, suggested by the passage. One, that we shall recognize each other, in the future state. For if the lost one could recognize Lazarus across the " great gulf ;" we can scarcely conjecture that recognition of friends, relatives, and others will not occur, in that world beyond the grave.

Another is, that, in the future state, there will be an eternal separation of the righteous from the wicked; the latter "going into everlasting punishment, and the former into life eternal." No sane man will deny, that our Lord describes Lazarus as being carried, at his death, "by the angels into Abraham's bosom;" and the rich man, at his death, "into hell and torment." And between these places, "a great gulf fixed:" so that there could be no passing from the one place to the other. If this passage be a *history*, the matter is settled beyond dispute. But, if it be not a history, it is certainly a *parable*. Then, what is a parable? A parable is the arranging of certain well known, admitted things, so as to teach something by the arrangement. The constituents of a parable are facts, well understood. "And he spake a parable unto them (by way of instructing them concerning his conduct, of which they had complained, saying this man receiveth SINNERS, and eateth with them!) saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." Here, each of the many constituents of the parable is a fact, familiar, well known, and, therefore, the parable is instructive: the sinner is the lost sheep: the owner is grieved at the loss; goes away from the ninety-nine (the real remainder) and seeks persistently until he finds it etc.; through the whole parable. But, suppose not one of these constituents to be a reality, and nothing other than an unsubstantial fancy: what would the parable teach? Nothing: no mortal could tell what was meant by it, for it could not mean anything. Examine, then, any

parable in the entire Scripture, and you will find no exception to this necessary rule, that the constituents of a parable must be well known facts.

Immediately ensuing the one just noticed, is that of the woman who having ten pieces of silver lost one, lighted a candle, swept the house, and sought diligently until she found it; and then invited her friends and neighbors to share her joy. Everything real. And, immediately following, is the parable of the prodigal son. Again everything real. Everything must be fact, reality, in the constituency of a parable, of necessity; nothing can be factitious but the arrangement

Therefore, upon the hypothesis that our passage is a parable, the rich man, poor man, wealth, health, poverty, disease, table, crumbs, gate, dogs, sores, licking, dying, angels, burying, Abraham, hell, torment, water, finger, brethren, repentance, gulf, Moses, prophets, all are realities; and only the arrangement is factitious. So if the passage be a history, the doctrine of the separation of the righteous from the wicked in the future state, the latter to be tormented forever; the former to be comforted forever; is distinctly STATED: and if it be a parable, it is, with equal distinctness TAUGHT.

“But now he (Lazarus) is COMFORTED, and thou (the rich man) art TORMENTED. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed (*chasma mega esteeriktai*): so that they which would pass from hence to you CANNOT (*mee dunoontai*, have not the ability, are unable); neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.” The destiny is FIXED: irrevocable: no purgatory being between the comfort and the torment; but a great, impassable gulf. Happiness, torment: no middle ground. Eternal happiness, eternal torment.

Repent, the voice celestial cries,  
Nor longer dare delay;  
The wretch that scorns the mandate DIES—.