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The Sabbath School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Quarter First. Lesson 6, Feb', 10, 1901

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS. —Matt. 25 : 14 30.

(MAY BE USED AS A TEMPERANCE LESSON)

GOLDEN TEXT.—*So then every one of us must give account of himself to God.*—Rom. 14 : 12

LEARN BY HEART

Vs. 20, 21, 29 ; Rev. 2 : 10, 28

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—Tuesday afternoon, April 4, A. D. 30, immediately following the last lesson.

Place.—Spoken on the Mount of Olives, on the way from Jerusalem to Bethany.

THE HOUSEHOLDER AND HIS SERVANTS.—Vs. 14, 15. *For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country.* He had to leave his affairs in competent hands.

The householder represents Jesus Christ, who was about to leave his disciples. *Who called his own servants.* The slaves of the Greeks and Romans were often men of varied mental attainments or considerable manual skill. Such were allowed to engage in business, paying a fixed yearly sum to their master, or, as here, they had money given to them wherewith to trade, and to bring him in a share of their profits.

The servants denote first of all the apostles, and then all Christ's professed followers, and all who have received from Christ the privileges and blessings of his gospel. *And delivered unto them his goods.* His property for trading purposes. It was in the form of money, talents. *And unto one he gave five talents.* A talent was 3 000 shekels, and as the weight of the Jewish shekel is variously estimated, there is considerable variation in the value given to the talent, which was doubtless a weight of silver, from $1,000 to $2,000, with no clear statement as to the reason for the difference.

The talents represent the powers and means God has entrusted to his people for carrying on his work. Among these talents are the Gospel itself, the truths Christ preached, training, energy, education, skill, Christian experience, health, wealth time opportunities, power of preaching and teaching, all the gifts and endowments of the Holy Spirit. *To every man according to his several ability.* In proportion as he deemed them qualified for larger or smaller administration. *Took his journey* into a far country. Representing Christ as leaving the earth in his bodily presence.

THE MAN WITH FIVE TALENTS — Vs. 16 21. *And traded with the same.* Literally, worked. The trading is the wise and earnest use of all the talents God has entrusted to us in accomplishing his work and aiding the progress of his kingdom. *And made them other five talents.* In an honest way he doubled his capital. A good bargain is one that is good for both parties. Both the capacity and the entrusted talents are increased by proper use. God gives larger opportunities, fuller measures of the Spirit, more important work, to those who have increased their ability to use them. *After a long time.* Long in the history of the whole church, and long enough in case of individuals, to allow them to make good use of the trust. *The lord of those servants cometh.* This refers doubtless first of all to the second coming of Christ, when he will judge the world in righteousness. But, as we have seen in former lessons, there are many comings,—in every crisis of life, in hours of trouble and trial, and especially in the hour of death. *And reckoneth with them* : has a settlement. They are to report what they have done with the talents entrusted to them. *Behold, I have gained beside them five talents.* He had doubled his spiritual capital. He was twice the man he was before. *His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant.* He had his lord's approval. Faithfulness, not success, nor the amount gained, was rewarded. There are no empty compliments in the day of judgement. *Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.* An intimation that there is enlarged activity as well as rest in the future world. All the joys of imparting good, of helping others, are multiplied. We constantly see this illustrated in this life. Faithfulness in the smaller sphere ever leads to a larger sphere. Thus only, can one become ruler over many things. *Enter thou into the joy of thy lord* : participate in my joy. It is thought by many that the figure here is that of a master making a great feast, and inviting the servants who had proved faithful. Such occasions were sometimes signalized by giving freedom to those servants who sat down with their master. The joy of the Lord Jesus Christ, of which the faithful shall partake in some measure here, and in its fulness hereafter, is (1) the joy of a free activity in doing right. (2) The joy of entire consecration and submission to God. (3) The joy of doing good, of self-denial for others (4) The joy of perfect faith in a wise and loving God. (5) Joy in the conscious love of God to us, communion with him (6) The joy of loving others. (7) The joy of seeing others saved (8) The joy of victory.

THE MAN WITH TWO TALENTS.—Vs 22, 23. *He also that had received two talents....gained two other talents.* He was faithful and as successful as the one who had received five talents. All depends on the ratio of faithfulness. *Well done, good and faithful servant.* He had the same rewards as the man with five talents, for he was equally faithful. The rewards were according to his ability. He had all he could use or enjoy.

Practical Applications. 1. Religion does not make all Christians alike, nor give them the same work to do. There is an infinite variety of endowments, and great diversity in opportunity for service.

2. Each has precisely what is fitted to his ability and circumstances, —no more, no less.

3. He that has the least has a great deal. What God has entrusted to the poorest and weakest of us is infinite in value and power.

4. It seems certain that the world is to grow better and richer, not by the magnificent achievements of the highly gifted few, but by the patient faithfulness of the one-talented many.

5. Phillips Brooks, in his sermon on the Man with Two Talents, suggests (1) that most of us count ourselves persons of two talents, average people. (2) The two-talented man has a great chance in the world. Being an average man he can sympathize with average men, and his success and usefulness show themselves as possible to the majority. Small talents with will and purpose can accomplish great things.

6. A little man with a great gospel is mightier than a great man with a little gospel. The gospel is the same mighty wisdom and power of God, no matter who uses its power.

THE MAN WITH ONE TALENT.—Vs. 18, 24 30. *But he that had received one went and digged in the earth.* Hiding treasure in the ground was a very common plan for safe keeping.

The talent is buried by neglect to use it, possibly from a fear of making mistakes, possibly from that vanity which is unwilling to do anything unless it is great or showy. *Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man.* That is, hard hearted ; insensible to the feelings of others in all matters relating to money. *Reaping where thou hast not sown.* Unjustly gathering for himself the fruits of other men's labors. *Gathering where thou hast not strawed,* or 'scattered.' The reference is, apparently, to the husbandman's work on the threshing-floor. He first scattered over the area of the floor the loosened sheaves of grain. Then he threshed them and gathered the pure grain. *And I was afraid.* To risk the money, lest he should lose it, and incur his master's displeasure. *Thou wicked and slothful servant.* Whatever his excuses, his real reasons are found in this sentence. *Thou knewest, i. e.,* accepting your statement. I will judge you by your own words. What you plead as an excuse is the very reason why you should have acted differently. *Thou oughtest therefore.* If you believed I am such a man as you say. *To have put my money.* It was mine, not yours. *To the exchangers.* To the bankers, who took money on deposit, paying interest to the depositors. *Received mine own with usury.* i. e., pay for the use of the money. *Take therefore the talent from him.* The punishment for refusing to use the talent is the loss of the talent itself. (1) The opportunities will be taken away from him who neglects them. (2) The ability to use them is taken away. The unused limb grows weak ; the inactive mind loses its power. *And give it unto him which hath ten talents,* because he is fitted to use it well. The talent must not lie idle. The faithful servant has not only those rewards which grow out of his faithfulness, but other and greater things are committed to his care. The talent cannot remain unused, the opportunities cannot remain neglected, because some are slothful. Those who are fitted to use them must have them. *For unto everyone that hath*: in the sense that the men of two and five talents possessed, by the hold which faithful use gives. *Shall be given, and he shall have abundance.* This is illustrated in worldly and intellectual affairs every day. *From him that hath not* : has not made true use of, and therefore does not really possess. *Shall be taken away even that which he hath* : which was entrusted to him. The opportunities pass away, the abilities diminish, the powers wane. So it will be in the spiritual world.

Sins of Omission. This man reminds us of those who were condemned in the parable of the judgment (Matt. 25 : 41-46), not for positive crimes, but for refusing to do the good they might have done. We are responsible not only for our sins, but for all the good that might have flowed from our lives, had we been faithful. *Cast....into outer darkness.* There was no other place for him. He had no part in the household of the saints, for he was not a saint. His punishment is the natural result of his crime. *Weeping and gnashing of teeth* : expressing the terrible pain and loss, which was all the greater because he brought it on himself. His lord had given him every opportunity, and done all that was possible, but he refused the opportunity.

A Teacher in Trouble.

A rap at the door of the minister's study, and one of the Sunday-school teachers of his church followed the invitation to come in.

Pastor, I want to talk with you a little about my Sunday school class.

All right, said the pastor, I shall be most happy to talk with you.

I have come this morning, because I feel utterly discouraged about my class.

How long have you had the class?

Five years.

What is your particular trouble?

I really do not know, and that is why I come to you. I have had the class so long, yet none of them are Christians, and it seems as though something must be wrong somewhere.

Have you ever talked with them personally about accepting Christ?

No, not personally, but I have several times talked with them all together, urging them to be Christians.

Did you give them an opportunity at such times, to show whether they wanted to accept Christ?

No. I never thought of that.

Do you really think you care for the souls in your class?

I thought I did, and yet never gave them a chance to accept Christ. When talking with them together in the class, I can see now that I might have given them some opportunity of making some sign. But then I really have no time to talk with them personally. I only see them Sundays, and then only during the Sunday-school hour.

How much time do you spend during the week praying for your class?

Well, I am ashamed to say it, but some weeks I never pray for them at all.

About the personal work—have you no time at all?

Not a moment, so far as I can see.

Did you ever pray for time to talk to each scholar personally?

I never thought of praying for time

How about writing to them? Could you not write to at least one every week if only a few lines?

Oh, yes, I could do that.

When any of your scholars are absent, do you go to their homes to see why?

No, and I have no time for that, either.

How about sending them a postal card, tell them that you are sorry that they were away, and that you will be glad to see them in the class next Sunday.

I really begin to feel as though I had not been doing anything.

Is there no time, Sunday, that you could see them besides the Sunday-school hour?

I do not see where there is a minute to spare. You see there is the regular church services to attend, the young people's prayer-meeting, sometimes the missionary service, and then oftentimes an anniversary in another church that I want to attend.

I am glad that you feel so loyal about attending the church services, and are anxious to know what is going on in other churches, but I would much prefer that you leave out one of your church services entirely, spending the time in calling on and talking personally with the members of your Sunday school class. For what more important business can we have on our hands than leading the children of the Sunday-school into the kingdom of God?

I also believe that if you will make this matter a subject of earnest prayer you will find many times in the week when some effort, however slight, may be made that will help your scholars.

First, there must be a willingness on your part to sacrifice for the young souls entrusted to your care. It is certainly a matter of vital importance that every Sunday-school teacher should be in the closest touch with her scholars : not tiring them with the subject of their salvation, but constantly keeping before them this great question in a tender, gentle, loving way.—Our Young Folks.

"Better Take a Sheep Too."

A valued friend and able farmer, about the time the temperance reform was beginning to exert a healthful influence, said to his newly-hired man :

Jonathan, I did not think to mention to you when I hired you, that I shall try to have my work done this year without rum. How much must I give you to do without?

Oh, said Jonathan, I don't care much about it ; you may give me what you please.

Well, said the farmer, I will give you a sheep in the fall if you will do without rum.

Agreed.

Father, will you give me a sheep too, if I do without rum? then asked the elder son.

Yes, you shall have a sheep if you do without.

The youngest son then said : Father, will you give me a sheep if I will do without?

Yes, Chandler, you shall have a sheep also.

Presently Chandler speaks again: Father, hadn't you better take a sheep too?

The farmer shook his head ; he hardly thought that he could give up the stimulant, but the appeal came from a source not easily to be disregarded, and the result was, the demon rum was thenceforth banished from the premises, to the great joy and ultimate happiness of all concerned.—Selected.

Did It a-Purpose.

Most Sunday school superintendents are duly wise in the matter and measure of their talking. Occasionally one is not. To hit that occasional case we retell this bit of experience, said to have occurred somewhere on the other side of the earth : The superintendent tapped a bell, without uttering a word ; the chorister rose and a hymn was sung ; another tap of the bell brought another to his feet to read a chapter ; a third tap and a prayer was offered : and so it went on to the close of the school, the superintendent never uttering a single word. The visitor, being very much impressed with the clockwork procedure, said to one of the teachers : Things seem to move on here very quietly. I noticed you got to work at the lesson in a very short time. The teacher replied, That is what we came here for. I noticed, too, said the visitor, that the superintendent did not say a word. Can't, replied the teacher. Why not? Dumb! How in the world did you happen to elect a dumb man? Did it a-purpose ; school had been talked to death, and so elected a man that couldn't talk. Have had time for lessons ever since. Never had before.—Unidentified.

He Got In.

A poor man who was looked upon as being very simple applied to a church whose membership was of what is called the wealthy class for admission as a member. He came before the appointed officers for examination.

As it was an aristocratic church, they did not like to accept him into membership, but, of course, they adopted the tactics of their class, and asked the poor, simple applicant if he was sure the Lord wanted him to become a member of the church. He replied that he was sure, as he had prayed over it for six months.

Well, they said, better pray over it three months longer, and see what the Lord wants you to do.

He assented, and at the end of three months he applied again.

The officers asked him if he was still of the same mind. He said, Yes. They asked him also if he had asked the Lord about it. He said he had. Then they asked him what the Lord said to him.

The poor, simple applicant replied, He told me not to be offended with you, brethren, for He himself had been trying for the past twelve years, since the church was built, to get in, but He had not succeeded yet.

Bishop Lightfoot (quoted in the C. M. I.) speaks, in reference to the neglect of female laborers, of "the Church's folly in trying to do her work with only one arm."

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