

“Let a Man Examine Himself”

We have come here this morning to learn. Our salvation depends on learning. We must learn what is wrong with ourselves—wherein we do not correspond with the pattern that God requires in those He will alone accept.

Every factory has a place of final inspection. Those products that conform to the required pattern are accepted; those that do not are rejected. God has given us a very clear pattern. He has told us just what to do; just what flaws to watch for, and how to correct them.

Suppose a piece of steel slips thru without passing through the purifying, tempering and hardening process—what happens when it reaches the inspector? It **looks** the same as the rest: it is the same **basic material**—but **what a difference** when the keen and searching inspection tests are applied! It turns out to be just the raw, natural, original material—weak, impure and faulty; totally unfit for the purpose intended, so—it is **cast aside**.

In connection with our purpose of assembly this morning—the memorial supper—the apostle says, by the inspiration of the Spirit (1 Cor. 11:28):

"Let a man EXAMINE HIMSELF," and v. 31, "If we would JUDGE OURSELVES, we should not be judged."

If we would have the wisdom to inspect ourselves and correct what is wrong, we should not fail in the final inspection. And how CAN we inspect ourselves? David asked this question—and answered it:

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereunto ACCORDING TO THY WORD" Psa. 119:9.

That last part is the important part. There are thousands of sources of information that tell you how to improve in various ways. Many devote endless precious hours to study for temporal self-improvement that will perish with the using, but there is only ONE place that tells how to get ready for eternal life—how to develop and train ourselves so we will be accepted as useful and valuable in the final inspection.

We must take heed to ourselves **according to God's Word**. We must study that Word, and compare ourselves with the pattern it gives. In all points where we fail to measure up to the pattern—and there are thousands of them—we have a job to do, and the period allowed us to do it is getting shorter all the time.

The portion of God's Word laid out to assist us in our self-examination today is Psalms 41-43. Beginning that portion, we read:

"Blessed is he that considereth the poor."

The word here translated 'consider' is usually translated 'understand' or 'behave wisely', and we note in the margin that for 'poor' is also given 'weak' or 'sick'. So there is a lot more meaning in this verse than just giving something to those in poverty.

God says here that those are blessed in His sight who concern themselves about the problems of others—those who seek to understand and act wisely for the benefit of those who are poor, weak or sick, whether this condition be physical or spiritual. The spirit's instruction is to—

"Bear ye one another's burdens" Gal. 6:2.

This is described as "*fulfilling the law of Christ*." We have noted that the real meaning of this word '*consider*' is to '*act wisely*'. This should ever be borne in mind. It is easy to be well-meaning but to act very UNwisely in this matter, making helpfulness an unconscious pretext for officiousness and self-gratification. What is intended is—instead of seeking our OWN pleasure and amusement and advantage—to devote our time and efforts to intelligently considering where help and comfort are really needed, and to apply ourselves to supplying them in an acceptable manner. As to the acceptable manner, a good guide is that of Jesus —

"Do to others as ye would that they should do to you."

In examining ourselves, therefore, as we meet around this table, how do we measure up to this clear requirement of God? DO we love our neighbours as ourselves, devoting ourselves to their welfare, and carefully avoiding all that might offend them, or are we so busy with our own affairs that we cannot be bothered to think of helping to carry the burden and solve the problem of others?

Paul said, writing from his prison cell—and it portrays a sad state of affairs —

"I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." (Phil. 2:20-21).

It meant nothing to them that he had lost everything, even his liberty. All were so tied up with their own plans for benefitting themselves and getting ahead in this life that they had no time to devote to the benefit of the brotherhood and the Truth. "*Of course*", said they, "*We'd LOVE to help. But we are SO busy. We're sure you'll understand.*" Paul understood, **only too well**. He said,

"Love seeketh not her own" 1 Cor. 13:5.

This is one of the many tests of value and usefulness that WILL BE APPLIED in the final day of inspection. He said again, earlier in the same epistle, (1 Cor. 4:10).

"We (the apostles) are fools for Christ's sake, but ye (the Corinthians) are wise, ye are rich, ye are full: we hunger and thirst and are naked and buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place". . . "Be ye followers of me". . . "Love seeketh not her own."

And now a thought from the first verse of Psalm (42).

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

How do we fit THIS pattern? This is a description of the ONLY type of person God will approve in the day of final inspection. But some will say, "*How can I help it if I do not feel that intense longing? Can I MAKE myself feel that way?*" **Yes**, you **can**—and you **must**. The scriptures explain how to begin, we must clearly recognize that this IS what God expects, that is the only really intelligent and reasonable frame of mind, and that it **MUST** be achieved. What stands between us and it is either natural, animal ignorance or the deceitfulness of other things. Jesus said:

"Lay not up treasure on earth: lay up treasure in heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be" Matt. 6:19-21.

Here is first, a plain **COMMAND**; 2nd, the **REASON** for that command; 3rd, the assured **RESULT** of obeying that command. It has two parts — one thing to carefully avoid, one thing to carefully perform. If all our treasure is invested in an enterprise, then we shall be very much concerned about the progress and interests of that enterprise. Here then is clear instruction on how to develop a thirst for God—just arrange your life like Paul so that all your material advantage and interests are wrapped up in the establishment of God's kingdom. It does not just mean possessions, but **ALL** the activities we are involved in and interested in.

Again, it is useless to expect to develop a thirst for one thing while continually drinking something else. God says worldly things must be put away by those who would seek a place in the divine scheme of things. Why? Because they interfere with and obstruct the development of spiritual appreciation and desire. If we carefully **follow the divine rules**, we shall get the desired results, and **no other** way. And the divine rules are very different from natural thinking.

The Spirit through Solomon gives another guide for developing a thirst towards the things of God. He records (Eccl. 7:2-3):

"It is better to go into the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."

The lack of a thirst toward the things of God reveals the lack of a perception of the emptiness and sadness of natural things, and the fullness and joy of spiritual things.

Of the present life, David said in the readings for yesterday (Psa. 39:5-7)

"Verily every man at his best is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them. And now, what wait I for? My hope is in thee."

So brief, so insecure, so overcast with sorrow, so filled with trouble and evil, so far short of what could be! Go to the house of mourning, the endless funeral procession, the hospitals, the asylums, the institutes for the blind, the numberless victims of selfish, senseless warfare, the inevitable bitterness and strife in all human activities, if you would develop a thirst for the new order of God. Cease to live in heedless self-entertainment, and a busyness to eat, drink and be merry; and stop to THINK.

Who was this man David who wrote these Psalms? What kind of a life had he, that he should see so clearly through its utter emptiness and delusion? Obscure in his youth—a quiet, meditative man of God. Thrust into sudden notoriety, not by his own choice, but as a result of the nation's faithlessness, and his own abundant faith. Thereafter he experienced treachery, ingratitude, persecution, peril and hardship, because of jealousy—fearful jealousy that fumed against the calm, successful courage of his faith. Cast out from his own people, a hunted fugitive in an alien land.

Then came prosperity, popular acclaim, power and authority as the divinely-anointed leader of the divinely-chosen, holy nation—the national vessel of God's tabernacling with men. What opportunity now for the fullness of life's purpose of joy! And so it seemed for a time, but while adversity had brought out his strength, prosperity revealed to him his weakness, whose shadow he was never again permitted to forget. The years that might have been so bright were stained as a result with strife, murder and civil war.

But against this dark background of human failure, God made with David the covenant of divine success, "*ordered in all things and sure.*" How much, in the light of his own discorded life, must these words have meant to him, "*ordered in all things and sure.*" And as he compared his own sad reign with the glorious picture of God's Kingdom, would he not thirst after God and exclaim,

"THIS is all my salvation and all my desire?"

In the third Psalm for today (43rd), he says, v. 3:

"O send out Thy light and Thy truth: let them lead me: let them bring me to Thine holy hill, and to Thy tabernacle."

Here is an earnest desire to be guided by God's Word, and an anxiety to be present at His assemblies of worship. Whenever the brethren and sisters are met together, the true godly mind is anxious to be there. SOME brethren and sisters are of this character, and some are not. The pattern recorded in the Word clearly reveals that it is only the former type that God will approve. Now is the time of opportunity to teach ourselves the wisdom of being such. We have read recently (Psa. 16:11)

"In Thy presence is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore."

This is our assurance and our goal. When we start to practice or study anything, there is no pleasure to begin with, but wisdom says, "*Continue at it, the pleasure will come with familiarity and accomplishment.*" How much truer and more important in divine things! There is fullness of joy in store for those who by God's guidance learn how to appreciate and evaluate TRUE joy—joy that has no sad aftermath, nor is snatched away at its height, but is perfect and unending. It is only for those

who learn how to remove from their own lives and characters all those carnal things that are out of harmony with godly joy.

In the N T reading (Matt. 25) there is ample instruction for a man to examine himself by: the parable of the 10 virgins, the parable of the talents, and the separating of the sheep from the goats—as searching and solemn a series of warnings as can be found anywhere in Scripture.

If God were to say to us, "*Leave your own pleasures and profit-seeking for half-an-hour, and do exactly as I say, and I will fill the rest of your present life with abundance and happiness,*" would we have any difficulty in obeying? But actually in proportion we are asked to do much LESS and are offered much MORE. If we could only bring ourselves to fully realize the magnitude of what is offered for faithfulness—but we cannot, it is too gigantic, it is beyond our comprehension, we are too wrapped up in present things.

Somehow the fact that for 6000 years an endless parade of men have lived brief snatches of life and passed on to nothingness does not impress us as it should with the utter brevity and unimportance of this life's affairs. We plan and worry and labour and fret, and what does it amount to? NOTHING. A breath. A vapour. A striving after wind. The one perfect life was lived without a place to lay his head.

There were 10 virgins, and 5 of them were wise, and 5 were foolish. This is a very sad parable, as indeed are most. We are apt to forget that the foolish virgins represent REAL people, brethren and sisters we have known, it could very easily be OURSELVES. They knew the bridegroom was coming, they believed it and were looking for it, they THOUGHT they were ready. They looked like the other virgins, they travelled along with them, they had lighted lamps just the same, but—there was very little oil in them—just enough to deceive themselves, but not enough to carry them through.

The lesson is SO clear; all the virgins read it over and over; but still there will be foolish virgins revealed at the judgment seat — self-deceived and unprepared. Why? Because the flesh is so deceitful, and so clever at making us believe we are what we are not. Let us look to our oil. We know what the oil is. It is the Spirit. We must be filled; not just enough to make a showing, but FILLED with it—filled with the knowledge of God, permeated with its divine characteristics so that it shines forth from us in faithful labour, patience, wisdom, self-control, kindness, gentleness, purity, holiness, and godliness.

"If THESE things be in you, AND ABOUND ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful; but he that lacketh these things is blind" 2 Pet. 1:8-9.

The next parable presents a different aspect of the same lesson—the man who entrusted various talents to his servants.

Our English word '*talent*' comes from this very parable. Talent is a Greek word, denoting a certain unit of money; the original meaning is '*something weighed out*'. Jesus used it to represent the various gifts or abilities that men are given to use for the glory and service of God, and it has come into our language with this meaning.

We are taught here that all men's abilities and possessions are carefully WEIGHED OUT to them for a specific purpose, and that in the day of inspection they will have to give account of how everything has been used. This idea of stewardship is very prominent in scriptural teaching and if it were better comprehended much future sorrow would be avoided.

V. 19: "After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them."

The unprofitable servant in this case is not charged with anything as serious as false use of his trust. He is not charged with any open wickedness—simply a slothful failure to put his abilities and possessions to his Lord's use. It is not enough that we simply abstain from what is forbidden; it is equally, or even more, important that we DO what is commanded.

Consider the excuse he makes, "*I knew thou art a hard man, and I was afraid.*" How common, and yet how unreasonable! "*I knew you expected a lot, therefore I made that an excuse to do nothing. I consoled myself with the assumption that I could not possibly satisfy you, so I did not try at all.*" What a mean way of putting the blame for his failure on the one who had given him "everything that he had!"

He may have thought, *"I have only been given one talent. It is clear that the Lord does not consider my part very important. I will explain to him that I knew he expected wise and careful dealing and would be angry if I made a slip and lost it, so I did not feel capable, or confident enough to try. I know that the capable, 5-talent brethren will take care of everything. My small bit will not be missed if I do not do it, nor noticed if I do."*

What did the Lord answer? *"You wicked unprofitable servant. You have condemned yourself by your own self-deceiving excuses for your spiritual laziness. You admit that you knew I would require an accounting and a bringing forth of fruit. You should have done the best you could, even though it were very small. Cast him out. Take his possessions and abilities away from him—he has not used them in my service. My kingdom is only for faithful workers."*

In the final part of the chapter Jesus drops the clothing of parable and speaks with unmistakable plainness, driving home the warning.

"Come, ye blessed of my Father; I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, and in prison, and ye ministered unto me."

This is the thought with which we began: *"Blessed is he that concerns himself to understand and act wisely in behalf of the poor, the weak, and the sick."* Many in the brotherhood, and even the brotherhood itself, are thirsty, weak, sick, strangers and in prison. In various aspects, and at various times, the descriptions fit us all. We all need mutual help. Only those will be approved and accepted who concern themselves about those things and devote their lives to help and improvement in the ecclesia and in the brotherhood.

The main thing is the Spirit of Christ—the oil in the lamps. That is what is always mostly lacking—and mostly needed. The Spirit of Christ does not worry about its own advantage or welfare or pride or justification. It does not mind even if it has no place to lay its head. It is anxious to help and heal and comfort, to stir up zeal, to promote harmony and righteousness and peace, to be about its Father's business, to labour in the vineyard, even though it be in but the humblest capacity.

Therefore, let a man examine himself and see how HE compares with these things. And wherein he finds that he does not correspond with the divine pattern by which all will finally be measured, let him diligently set himself to DO SOMETHING about it. Let him put it FIRST on his list of things to be done, before all temporal activities and schemes of advancement that perish with the using.

"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."

— G.V.G.
