

Milk & Honey

Vol. XIX March, 2004 No. 3

Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Beware of Covetousness

C. H. Mackintosh

And said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” (Luke 12:15)

How difficult it is to define this “covetousness!” how hard to bring it home to the conscience! It is, as some one has said of worldliness, “shaded off gradually from white to jet black.” It is only as we are imbued with the spirit and mind of heaven, and thoroughly schooled in the principles of eternity, that we shall be able to detect its working.

In the parable of the rich man, which the Lord here puts forth as an illustration of covetousness, we see a character which the world respects and admires. But in this, as in every thing else brought forward in this searching chapter, we see the difference between now and then—between time and eternity. All depends upon the light in which you look at men and things. If you merely look at them now, it may be all very well to get on in trade, and enlarge one's business, and make provision for the future. The man who does this is counted wise now, but he will be a “fool” then. Let us remember that we must make God's then to be our now; we must look at the things of time in the light of eternity—the things of earth in the light of heaven.

“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully.” (verse 16) What sin is there in being a successful agriculturist or merchant? If God blesses a man's labor, should he not rejoice? Surely yes; but mark the moral progress of a covetous heart. “He thought within himself.” He did not think in the presence of God but rather within the narrow compass of his selfish heart. Therefore we need not marvel at his practical conclusion: “What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?” What! Was there no way of using his resources with a view to God's future? Alas! no. Man has a future (or thinks he has) on which he counts, and for which he makes provision; but self is the only object which figures in that future—self, whether in my own person or that of my wife or child, which is morally the same thing.

The great object in God's future is Christ, and true wisdom will lead us to fix our eye on Him, and make Him our undivided object for time and eternity—now and then. But this, in the judgment of a worldly man, is nonsense. Listen to the wisdom of earth, and the wisdom of those who are under the influence of earthly maxims and habits: “And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and built greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.” What a miserable treasure house to contain the “all” of an immortal soul! God was not an item in the catalogue. God was neither his treasury nor his treasure. “And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” Thus we see that a worldly man's provision is only “for many years.” Make the best of it; it cannot go beyond that narrow span of time. And this provision he offers to his never-dying soul as the basis of its ease and merriment. How senseless! “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” And then mark the moral of all this: “So is he [no matter who—saint or sinner] that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

My main object in this paper is to deal with Christian consciences. I ask the Christian reader, therefore, whether it is in keeping with Christ's doctrine, as set forth in the gospel, for His disciples to lay up for themselves treasure on the earth. It seems almost an absurdity to pose such a question in the face of Luke 12 and parallel scriptures. “Lay not up for yourselves treasure on the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.” This is plain enough and only wants an honest conscience to apply it in order to produce its proper results. It is directly contrary to the doctrine of the kingdom of God, and perfectly incompatible with true discipleship, to lay up “treasure” in any shape or form “on the earth.” In this we have only to remember that we are in the kingdom of God in order to know how we should act. The principles of that kingdom are eternal and binding upon every disciple of Christ.

“And He said unto His disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1 – Beware of...

for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment” (verses 22,23). “Be careful [or anxious] for nothing,” says the Spirit by the apostle Paul. Why? Because God is caring for you. There is no use in two thinking about the same thing when One can do everything and the other can do nothing. And after relieving the minds of His disciples in reference to present supplies and future treasure, He says, “But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you” (verse 31). That is, I am not to seek the kingdom with the latent thought in my mind that my wants will be supplied in consequence. That would not be true discipleship. A true disciple never thinks of anything but the Master and His kingdom; and the Master assuredly think of him and his wants. That be free, perfectly free, from care.

The Lord then adds, “Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” If I have treasure on earth, no matter in what shape, my heart will be there also, and I shall be a downright worldly man. How shall I most effectually empty my heart of the world? By getting it filled with Christ. He is the true treasure which neither the world’s “bags” nor its “storehouses” can contain. The world’s barns will fall and its bags will wax old: and then, what will become of the treasure? Truly “they build too low that build beneath the skies.”

Yet people will build and hoard up, if not for themselves, at least for their children, or in other words, their second selves. And in numberless cases, the hoard, in place of proving a blessing, proves a positive curse to the child by taking him off the proper ground appointed for him in God’s moral government, namely, “working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have [not to hoard up for himself or for his second self, but] to give to him that needeth.” (Eph. 4:28) This is God’s appointed ground for every man.

But why need I hoard up for my children? If I can trust God for myself, why not trust Him for them likewise? Cannot the One who has fed and clothed me feed and clothe them also? Let not the truth be misunderstood or misinterpreted. I am bound, by the powerful obligations of the word and example of God, to provide for my own, for “if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8).

This is plain enough. And, moreover, I am bound to fit my children, so far as God’s principles admit and my

province extends, for any service to which He may be graciously pleased to call them. But I am no where instructed in the Word of God to give my children a hoard in place of an honest occupation, with simple dependence upon a heavenly Father. As a matter of actual fact, few children ever thank their fathers for inherited wealth; whereas they will ever remember, with gratitude and veneration, having been led, by parental care and management, into a godly course of action for themselves.

I shall only add, before closing this paper, that the Lord Jesus, who has sought to raise—by His unearthly principles—the thoughts and affections of His disciples to their proper center and level, gives them two things to do; and these two things may be expressed in the words of the Holy Spirit: “To serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9,10). The teaching of Luke 12, from verse 35 to the end, falls under these two headings. We have no one else to serve but “the living God” and nothing to wait for—nothing worth waiting for—but “His Son.” May the Holy Spirit clothe His own Word with heavenly power so that it may come home to the heart and conscience, and tell upon the life of every child of God, that the name of the Lord Christ may be magnified and His truth vindicated in the conduct of those that belong to Him. May the grace of an honest heart, and a tender, upright, well-adjusted conscience, be largely ministered to each and all of us, so that we may be like a well-tuned instrument, yielding a true tone when touched by the Master’s hand, and harmonizing with His heavenly voice. *

Continued from page 3— The Room

hand. And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that they hurt. They started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key. But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him.

No, please not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn’t bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than my own. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one? Finally He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes.

But this was a pity that didn’t anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn’t say a word. He just cried with me.

Continued on page 4

