

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Table - the servant's need for food and clothing

First of all, I should like to take the liberty of explaining why this little series has the title 'The Servant's Chamber'. It is to encourage us all to be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to take advantage of the resources He makes available to us to be able to do so. Also, to encourage us to do whatever we can to provide whatever facilities will be helpful to other servants of the Lord.

The picture is taken from 2 Kings 4. We read there that the prophet Elisha was active in the service of God. His work involved him in many journeys requiring him to stay away from his own home overnight. A woman, who was clearly observant, and who lived in an area Elisha visited from time to time, noticed this. She said to her husband, "I think we should help the prophet. Let us welcome him into our home. Let us do what we can to help him on his way in his service for God." The record describes the kind provision she made for him during his stays, which were evidently quite regular.

Now, it would be accurate to talk about this arrangement as being a Prophet's chamber. It undoubtedly was just that. The danger would be that the majority of us, myself included, would be tempted to think and even say, "That lets me out. I'm no prophet." And the vast majority of us would be quite right. In these New Testament times in which we live, prophecy is a specific gift which is given only to particular individuals. However, I would say that it is quite valid to make this of wider application. I suggest that we look at it in a general way as a servant's chamber, and not narrow it down to that of a prophet. Surely, there must be few of us who would not accept that there is some way in which we can serve the Lord while we wait for His coming. As the little hymn by Elsie Duncan Yale says:

*There's a work for Jesus, Ready at your hand,
'Tis a task the Master Just for you has planned.
Haste to do his bidding, Yield Him service true;
There's a work for Jesus, None but you can do.*

*There's a work for Jesus, Humble though it be,
'Tis the very service He would ask of thee.
Faint not, grow not weary, He will strength renew;
There's a work for Jesus, None but you can do.*

And, then, the rousing chorus:

*Work for Jesus, day by day,
Serve Him ever, falter never; Christ obey.
Yield Him service, loyal, true:
There's a work for Jesus none but you can do.*

In those terms, surely none of us would wish to exclude ourselves from being servants of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We can be assured that the Lord will enable us to serve Him in whatever way He thinks best. This little incident in Elisha's life gives us a fitting illustration of what is involved.

We are told that this kind woman made available to Elisha a little room, furnished with a bed, a table, a stool and a lamp. Notice, first of all, it was a little room. She did not go over the top in what she provided. There was clearly no intention on her part of impressing either her friends and neighbours, or indeed the prophet himself. The provision was quite modest. Within that little room, there was adequate provision for Elisha's essential needs, encompassed by the bed, the table, the stool and the lamp. I must leave to others to talk about the bed, the stool and the lamp. It is my job to say something about the table. Throughout the Bible, the simple table is used as a picture of both fellowship and the opportunity to enjoy food, particularly in company with others. While they are closely related, let us think about these two things separately for a moment.

Fellowship

We all know what it is like to sit around a table with family and friends, and enjoy congenial conversation and a meal together. Because of this, the table is used consistently in the Bible to demonstrate the need, the enjoyment and the benefits of fellowship with those who are like-minded.

As Christians, there is more than one level of fellowship in which we participate. At the highest level, we enjoy sweet communion with the Lord Jesus Himself, our Lord and Master. Through Him, the Son, we also have the great privilege of fellowship with the Father, that is, His Father and our Father. Nothing can or should be sweeter to our taste than that.

Then, we have been brought into sweet fellowship with our fellow Christians, on the basis of sharing together in the bonds of Christian love. There isn't a better fellowship on earth known to man. There will be particularly close fellowship with those with whom we share in the work of the Lord.

We are intended, of course, to enjoy also our natural family relationships, too, more particularly if they are believers on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fundamentally, fellowship is all about sharing things in common. 1 John 1:3 tells us, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." This is true for all real Christians, that is, believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. The fellowship will draw us closer together than any natural or earthly tie ever could. In being drawn to the Father and the Son, we are drawn closer to each other. That is, we have fellowship together in the enjoyment of a common bond.

Some of the features of the fellowship

When we examine what the scriptures say about Christian fellowship, we read about such things as:-

The fellowship <u>of</u> God's Son	1 Corinthians 1:9
Fellowship <u>with</u> the Father and the Son	1 John 1:3
The fellowship <u>of</u> the blood of Christ	1 Corinthians 10:16
The fellowship <u>of</u> the Holy Spirit	2 Corinthians 13:14
Fellowship <u>in</u> the gospel	Philippians 1:5

These terms are complementary to one another. They are certainly not contradictory.

When the Apostle Paul speaks about the fellowship **of** God's Son, he is drawing our attention to the fact that the Son of God is the focal point of the fellowship. He is central to it. Indeed, He is vital to it. Without Him, there would be no true fellowship to enjoy. It concerns Him, His interests, His honour, His glory. We can only have part in it because of our relationship with Him. When the Apostle John says in 1 John 1:3, "Our fellowship is **with** the Father and **with** His Son Jesus Christ", what is he telling us? He is saying that we have been brought into a spiritual realm where we can live in the enjoyment of an intelligent appreciation of that wonderful eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, that is, God the Father and God the Son!

In 1 Corinthians 10:16 of that epistle, Paul says we have part in "the fellowship of the blood of Christ." That is, we have a relationship with God because the blood of Christ was shed on our behalf. Our sins have been forgiven. We have been brought near to God through the death of His Son. The distance caused by our sins has been removed. There is now no barrier between ourselves and God. We have a relationship with God. We are His dear children. We now know Him as our Father, because we are linked with His Son, Who is alive from among the dead. We have a new life that could never have been ours unless Christ had died and risen again. 2 Corinthians 5:15 says, "Christ died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him Who died for them, and rose again."

2 Corinthians 13:14 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." As with every Christian blessing, true fellowship can only be enjoyed in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit. There was no way that we could have made ourselves right with God. If we are right with God, it is through the death of His Son, made good in our souls by the Holy Spirit. It is just as true that there is no way that we can maintain in our own strength, or enjoy and appreciate by our own power, the fellowship to which we have been called. It can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

There is a well-known phrase, "The family that prays together stays together." I'm sure you have heard it, and agree with it. In a similar vein, I would say, "Christians who work together are much more likely to stay together, and enjoy their fellowship together." One fundamental reason for the Lord leaving us here is that we might work together,

spreading the good news of the Christian gospel. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and ... He was buried, and ... He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Paul gives thanks to God that the Philippians did just that, having what he so happily calls "fellowship in the gospel" (Philippians 1:5). It cannot be without significance that it is the Philippian Epistle which says so much about joy. I am sure that we Christians would enjoy each other's company much more if we spent more time having fellowship in the gospel, winning souls for Christ. And more spiritual joy would be experienced.

Some residual questions:

1. Am I being absolutely honest with myself when I call myself a Christian?
2. Am I really and truly a believer on Him?
3. Are my sins really forgiven?
4. Have I really put my personal faith in Christ?

Once that basic matter has been sorted out, I can ask myself the following additional questions about fellowship:

1. What do I personally contribute to the local Christian fellowship?
2. Is my home open to weary travellers? Those who
 - are sad?
 - Upset?
 - Lonely?
 - Anxious?
3. If a visitor, like, say, Elisha in our chapter, arrives unexpectedly, do I make sure that I speak to him or her and make sure he or she feels welcome?
4. Am I prepared to offer:
 - a bed for the night?
 - a meal?
 - a little fellowship?
 - a little practical help with travelling expenses?
5. If I have the space in my home, do I make a little room available as a Servant's Chamber?
6. If someone has an obvious problem, do I quietly do what I can to help?

Permit me what I trust you will accept as a word in season. Time is short. The Lord is coming soon. There is so much to do. Have what fellowship you can with any Christian you meet along the way. It is wonderful to meet someone you have never seen before, and realise you have so much in common because you are both trusting in the same Saviour. What a tribute to the grace of God you have both experienced! But, please! As far as regular, practical fellowship is concerned, charity begins at home. Throw yourself wholeheartedly into all possible activities in your acknowledged spiritual home. Pull your weight. Be fully involved. You will then enjoy the blessing of the Lord in the fellowship you enjoy with those who are like-minded in the faith.

Food

I have no idea who was the first person who said it, but I am sure we have all heard the statement, "An army marches on its stomach". Furthermore, I am sure we would all agree that workers need to be adequately fed, both in quality and quantity, if they are to render proper service to their Master. This is just as true in spiritual things as in natural life.

Natural life must be sustained, developed and promoted. That requires a balanced diet of wholesome natural food and refreshment, properly digested, together with appropriate exercise. This is a picture of the even more important spiritual truth. Spiritual life must be nurtured and developed by a balanced diet of wholesome spiritual food. The Word of God provides it. In no way, in no place and in nothing can any other provision, however palatable, compare with the Word of God. In this, as in so many other ways, the Word of God is unique.

It is worth noting that in spiritual things, as in the natural realm, a good appetite is a sign of good health. Hear the internal testimony of scripture itself:

- 'I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food' Job 23:12.
- 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.' Jeremiah 15:16
- 'Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. Ezekiel 3:3
- 'I took the little book ... and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.' Revelation 10:10

That last quotation reminds us that we must accept and apply to ourselves all the scriptures. Even those, perhaps we should say particularly those, we might find unpalatable because we know they apply in a special way to ourselves, are to be received and obeyed.

The Scriptures promote Growth

As in natural life, so in spiritual life. Good food promotes good health. Spiritual life is the primary life, the reality. Natural life is the secondary life, the God-given picture of what the reality may be. For this reason, Peter uses the illustration of natural growth to emphasise the importance of spiritual growth, and the function of regular partaking of spiritual food in promoting that growth. 'As new born babes, desire earnestly the pure mental milk of the word, that by it ye may grow up' (1 Peter 2:2). It is instinctive in a new born baby to desire food. Persuasion is not necessary. It longs for it, and clamours for it until it is provided. It then devours it with evident relish. Growth results. There is something wrong if this chain of events does not occur. It is even more true in spiritual things. There is something sadly wrong if a Christian has no desire for the provision of good spiritual food from the Scriptures.

It must be noted that the appetite of all Christians, not only that of spiritual babes, must follow this pattern. As long as we are left here on earth, spiritual growth is possible. It comes to us as we feed on the Word of God. The natural pattern reminds us that the food is put to best use, and proper balanced growth results, only where the intake of good food is balanced by regular, sensible exercise of the right kind and quantity. Let us see to it that we gain full value from the spiritual food made available to us. Let us put it into practice in balanced, practical Christian life and service. Only in this way will true spiritual growth be seen.

The Scriptures give Strength

Strength, as well as growth, is dependent on a regular intake of good food. The figure of a young man suggests that which is vital, virile, powerful, at the peak of physical prowess. For that reason, this figure is introduced in Scripture to direct us to the spiritual counterpart.

'I have written to you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.' 1 John 2:14.

In this verse, we are directed to the condition, the secret of the strength and the result.

<u>The Condition</u>	'Ye are strong'
<u>The Secret Cause</u>	'The Word of God abideth in you'
<u>The Result</u>	'Ye have overcome the wicked one.'

If we are to overcome the wicked one, Satan himself, the strong one (as the Lord Jesus Himself spoke of him), it can only be as the Word of God abides in us and imparts a strength we could never have without it. This strength is a moral strength, the result of spiritual strength, imparted by the application of the Word of God to our willing hearts. This strength develops with the measure in which the Word of God has commanded our obedience.

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