

Ordinary 31B - 2021

Full Devotion to God

In the days of the circuit riders a minister was out riding one afternoon and came upon a man out working in his field. "Fine day isn't it?" the minister called out. "It's fine for you", the man replied, "All you have to do is ride around on that horse thinking about God all day long, while I have to sweat here in this field and then walk home afterward. I don't think it is right you should have things so easy while I have to work so hard." "On the contrary", the minister answered, "thinking about God is one of the most difficult things you can do. And to prove it, I'll give you this horse if you can think about God and nothing else for one minute." "You're on," said the man and immediately he sat down in silence. Thirty seconds later he looked up at the minister, and said, "Does that include the saddle?" (by Richard Fairchild from *Not Far from the Kingdom of God*)

Loving Out of Obligation

A rabbi was asked, "Which act of charity is higher--giving out of obligation or giving from the heart?" All in the class were inclined to respond that giving from the heart had something more in it, but they knew the rabbi was going to say just the opposite, because in spiritual teaching nothing is logical. They were not disappointed. "Giving from the heart is a wonderful thing," the rabbi said, "It is a very high act and should never be demeaned. But there is something much more important that happens when somebody gives charity out of obligation. "Consider who is doing the giving. When somebody gives from the heart, there is a clear sense of oneself doing something; in other words, heartfelt charity always involves ego gratification. "However, when we give out of obligation, when we give at a moment that every part of us is yelling NO! because of one reason or another--perhaps the beneficiary is disgusting, or it is too much money, or any of thousands of reasons we use to avoid giving charity--then we are confronting our own egos, and giving nonetheless. Why? Because we are supposed to. And what this means is that it is not us doing the giving, rather we are vehicles through which God gives... (by David A. Cooper from *Entering the Sacred Mountain: A Mystical Odyssey*, Bell Tower)

Love of Christ

Legend has it that a wealthy merchant traveling through the Mediterranean world looking for the distinguished Pharisee, Paul, encountered Timothy, who arranged a visit. Paul was, at the time, a prisoner in Rome.

Stepping inside the cell, the merchant was surprised to find a rather old man, physically frail, but whose serenity and magnetism challenged the visitor. They talked for hours.

Finally the merchant left with Paul's blessing. Outside the prison, the concerned man inquired, "What is the secret of this man's power? I have never seen anything like it before." Did you not guess?" replied Timothy. "Paul is in love." The merchant looked bewildered. "In Love?" "Yes," the missionary answered, "Paul is in love with Jesus Christ."

The merchant looked even more bewildered. "Is that all?" Smiling, Timothy replied, "Sir, that is everything." (by G. Curtis Jones from *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*, Nashville: Broadman, p. 225)

Living In the Kingdom of God: loving God living in his neighbors.

Once, a village blacksmith had a vision. An angel came to him and said "The time has come for you to take your place in His kingdom." "I thank God for thinking of me" said the blacksmith, "but as you know, the season of sowing the crops will soon be here. The people of the village will need their ploughs repaired, and their horses shod. I don't wish to seem ungrateful, but do you think I might put off taking my place in the kingdom until I have finished?" The angel looked at him in a wise and loving way of angels. The blacksmith continued his work, and almost finished when he heard of a neighbor who fell ill in the middle of the planting season.

The next time the blacksmith saw the angel he pointed out towards the barren fields, and pleaded with the angel. "Do you think eternity could hold of a little longer? If I don't finish my job, my friend's family will suffer." Again the angel smiled and vanished. The blacksmith's friend recovered, but another's barn was burned down and a third was in deep sorrow at the death of his wife.

And the fourth... and so on... Whenever the angel appeared, the blacksmith just spread out his hands in a gesture of resignation and compassion and drew the angel's eyes to where the suffering was.

One evening the blacksmith began to think of the angel and how he had put him off for such a long time. He felt very old and tired, and he prayed "Lord, if you would like to send your angel again, I would like to see him now." He'd no sooner spoken than the angel appeared before him. "If you still want me to take me," said the blacksmith; "I am now ready to take my place in the kingdom of the Lord." The angel looked at the blacksmith, and smiled, as he said, **"Where do you think you have been living all these years?"** (Jack McArdle in *"And That's the Gospel Truth"*).

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