

The Service of Consecration

J.R. Miller:

The more deeply we read into the life and teachings of our Lord and his apostles—the more clearly does it appear that the golden thought of "loving others" comes out of the very heart of the gospel. It lies embedded not only in John's Epistles—but in the teachings of the Master himself. Love for God is only a vaporous sentiment, a misty emotion—unless it manifest itself in love for men.

Our Lord gave us a picture of the last judgment which at first almost startles us; for, instead of making faith in himself or love for God the test of men's lives—he makes all turn, in that great final day, upon the way they have treated others in this world! Those who have used their gifts to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to relieve the distress of the poor, the prisoner, the sick—are welcomed into eternal joy. Those who have shut up their hands and hearts, allowing human need and suffering to go unrelieved, are themselves shut out from eternal blessedness!

Are men, then, after all, saved by good works? No! The meaning of the picture, lies deeper than that. True love for Christ—always opens men's hearts toward their fellows. There is another feature of the picture, which presents this truth in still clearer light. Christ appears accepting everything done to the needy—as done to himself in person!

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me.'"

Then, when the righteous say, in amazement, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or without clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and visit You?" "And the King will answer them, 'I assure you: Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'" Matthew 25:34-40.

You did not know it—but every time you fed a hungry neighbor, or gave a cup of water to a thirsty pilgrim, or visited a sick man, or clothed an orphan child, or wrought any ministry of kindness to one in need—you did it to Me." That is, the way Jesus wants us to serve him—is by serving those who need our ministry. The incense he loves best—is that which is burned, not in a golden censer to waste its perfume on the air—but in the homes of need to cheer some human weariness or comfort some human sorrow.

The whole matter of practical consecration is oft times very unsatisfactory. We say that we give ourselves to Christ, making an unreserved consecration of all our gifts and powers to his service. We are sincere—yet we are not conscious that in our actual living—we utterly fail to make good our solemn covenants and honest intentions! It may help us take our consecration out of the region of the emotional and make it real—to remember that it is a living sacrifice we are to make of ourselves to God—that is, it is not merely hymn-singing, praying and love-rapture he wants—but a living service in his name and for him—in this blighted world.

The old Catholic monks used to hide away in deserts and mountains and in monastery cells, as far as possible from human sin and need, and thought that was the kind of service Christ wanted. Sometimes they would torture themselves, lacerate their bodies, fast, live in the cold and storms. Some of them dwelt for years on tops of pillars and monuments, exposed to rain and snow, to heat and tempest—and thought that they were offering most acceptable sacrifices to God.

But they were not. They were only wasting, in idle day-dreams, useless sacrifice, unavailing suffering and hideous self-torture—the glorious gifts which God had bestowed upon them to be used in serving others. Only the living sacrifice is pleasing to God. We bring our natural endowments, our acquired powers or gains, our gifts and blessings, to his feet; and, touching them with his blessing, he gives them back to us and says, "Take these back again—and use them for me in bearing joy, help, comfort, cheer or inspiration—to those around you and in life's paths—who need your ministries."

As we read still more deeply into the heart of this matter, we find that God bestows no gift, power or blessing upon us—for ourselves alone!

Take money. The mistake of the rich man in our Lord's parable in Luke 16—was not that he was rich. He made

his wealth honestly. God gave it to him in abundant harvests. But his sin began, when he asked, "What shall I do with all this wealth? Where shall I bestow all my fast-increasing goods?" His decision showed that he was living only for himself. He thought not of his relation to God aboveâ€"or to men about him.

"I will build larger barns, and there store my goods." Instead of using his wealth to bless othersâ€"he would hoard it and keep it all in his own hands. The man who fulfills his mission and illustrates his consecration when money is given to himâ€"is he who says, "This money is not mine. I have received it through God's blessing. He has greatly honored me in making me his agent to use it for him. It is a sacred trust, granted to be employed in his name for the blessing of men; I must do with itâ€"just what Christ himself would do if he were here in my place!"

Or take knowledge. Education, in a consecrated life, is not to be sought for its own sakeâ€"but that we may thereby be made capable of doing more for the good or the joy of others. Each new lesson in life, each new accession to our knowledge, each new experience, is legitimately employedâ€"only when it is turned at once into some channel of personal helpfulness to others. One has the gift of music, and can sing or play well. The kind of consecration Christ wants of this giftâ€"is its use to do good to others, to make them happier or better, to put songs into silent hearts, and joys into sad hearts. Of all gifts, there is no one, perhaps, capable of a diviner ministry than is the gift of song.

"God sent his singers upon earth,
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again."

A young lady can read well. If she would carry out the spirit of her consecration to Christ, she is to employ her gift of readingâ€"in giving happiness and profit to others. She can brighten many an evening hour in her own homeâ€"by reading aloud to the loved ones that cluster around the hearth-stone. Or she can do still more Christly work by seeking out the aged with dim eyes, the poor who cannot read, or the sick in their lonely chambersâ€"and quietly and tenderly reading to them words of comfort, instruction, and divine love.

Take the blessings of spiritual experience. There is a wonderful sentence in one of Paul's letters. He is thanking God for the comfort which he had given to him in some sorrow, and he says, "Blessed be the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troublesâ€"so that we can comfort those in any trouble, with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." That is, Paul praised God not merely because he himself had been comfortedâ€"but because the comfort which had been given to him in his sorrowâ€"gave him added power with which to comfort others.

It was a great thing to feel the warmth of God's love breaking into his heart, the light of his face streaming upon his soul, and his blessed peace stealing into his bosom. But Paul's personal experience of joy in being thus comfortedâ€"was entirely buried away in the gladness of the other thought, "Ah! now I can be a better preacher to the troubled. I can bring more consolation to the sorrowing! I have gotten a new power of helpfulness with which to serve my fellows! I can do more hereafter to wipe away tears and to put songs into the hearts of others!" It was for this, that he thanked Godâ€"not that the comfort of God had been imparted to him, although that was a great joyâ€"but that he had something now which he never had before with which to do good and scatter blessings to others! His greatest gladness was not that God had lighted a new lamp in his soulâ€"to pour its heavenly beams upon his own sorrow, although that was cause for deep praiseâ€"but that he had now a new lamp to carry into other darkened homes. What a sublimity of usefulness! Yet that is the true Christian way of receiving comfort and every spiritual gift and blessing. That is the true idea of consecration.

"When you have repented," said the Master to Peterâ€""strengthen and build up your brothers." His meaning was, that a new power of personal helpfulness was to come to him through his sad experience, which he should use in strengthening others to meet temptation. Then, when he had passed through that terrible night, when he had been lifted up again, when he had crept back to the feet of his risen Lord and had been forgiven and reinstated, he had double cause for gratitudeâ€"that he himself had been saved from hopeless wreck and restored, and, still more, that he was now a better man, prepared, in a higher sense than before, to be an apostle and a patient, helpful friend to others in similar trial.

Then take the still more wonderful experience of our Lord's own temptation. He certainly endured for his own sake that he might become Conqueror and Lord of all, that he might be "made perfect through suffering." But that which the Scriptures love to linger upon as the chief reason why he was called to pass through temptation, was that he might thereby be fitted, by his own experiences, to be to his people a sympathizing and helpful

Friend and Savior.

The meaning of all this, is that we are to receive even our spiritual gifts and blessings, not only as mere tokens of the love and kindness of God toward us—but also as new powers with which we are to serve our fellow-men. It is easy to be selfish, even in the region of our most sacred spiritual life. We may want comfort—only that we may be comforted ourselves. We may desire high attainments in Christian life for their own sake—with no wish to be made thereby greater blessings to the world. But when we seek in this way, we may not receive. Even in spiritual things, selfishness restrains the divine outflow toward us.

God does not like to bestow his blessings, where they will be hoarded or selfishly used. He loves to put his very best gifts, into the hands of those who will not store them away in barns, or fold them up in napkins and hide them away—but will scatter them abroad. He puts his songs—into the hearts of those who will sing them out again. This is the secret of that promise, that to him that has—shall be given, and of that other little understood, little believed, little practiced word of Christ, "It is more blessed to give—than to receive."

Heaven's blessing comes, not upon the receiving—but upon the dispensing. We are not blessed in the act of taking—but in the act of giving out again. Things we take to keep for ourselves alone, fade in our hands. Men are good and great before God, not as they gather into their hands and hearts the abundant gifts of God, whether temporal or spiritual—but as their gathering augments their usefulness, and makes them greater blessings to others!