

Discourse: **That Servant**

Opening hymn: 23 / Closing hymn: 273

Greetings from your brethren that meet as the Austin Bible Students.

Why this subject?

One approach would be to go over all the scriptures that give some illustration of the agent that the Lord would use at his return. Matthew 24:45-47 would be in that list. A few others would be Aaron as a mouthpiece for Moses, Ezekiel 9 which closes with the man clothed with linen, which *had* the inkhorn by his side and obviously the 7th Messenger of Revelation and the other times the same agent is represented as an Angel or messenger in Revelation.

Who is the audience and what is the primary benefit of this approach? Some might reason that by showing the overwhelming number of related illustrations and prophecies pointing to a single agent would in and of itself lead a person to seek to know the Lord and to honor and respect the agent that he chose to use at his return.

When we find someone seeking the Lord if happily they might find him is this the information we start with? No, we all start at the same place, we preach unto them Jesus, and this leads to the plan of salvation.

How about for those that have already found the Lord and come into harmony with this wonderful plan of the ages, if only to the point of full faith in the Ransom sacrifice? Do we really need to convince such who the agent was that our returned Lord chose to use? Given the importance of our Lord's second advent should it really surprise anyone that he would have single agent as his representative on the earth and that God would have included numerous illustrations and prophecies in the scriptures to show the many works and roles this individual would need to fulfill?

It has been my experience over the years as I have traveled and met with various ecclesias of brethren professing full consecration unto the Lord and have communicated in various ways with an even larger community that has included the same individuals and others that are at least members of the household of faith I have found an almost universal agreement as to who fulfilled the role of the Servant of Matthew 24 and all of these other illustrations and prophecies.

To this group the primary object to this type of approach would be to strengthen our faith as we would see through the study the ways in which every detail of

those illustrations and prophecies have been fulfilled.

That is not the approach we are going to take today. As I have gone over this subject in my mind throughout the years I am convinced that the important lessons are not who fulfilled the role of the servant of Matthew 24 and what was given to that servant but why and how should the household of faith continue to use the resources provided by our returned Lord through that servant.

First, why should the household of faith continue to use the resources provided by our returned Lord through That Servant? To answer this question, we will first consider the verses of Matt 24:45-47.

From the King James Version: Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

From the Diaglott: "Who then is the Faithful and prudent Servant, whom his Master has placed over his Household, to give them Food in due Season? Happy that Servant Whom his Master on coming, shall find thus employed! Indeed, I say to you, he will appoint him over All his possessions."

From Youngs Literal Translation: "Who, then, is the servant, faithful and wise, whom his lord did set over his household, to give them the nourishment in season? Happy that servant, whom his lord, having come, shall find doing so; verily I say to you, that over all his substance he will set him."

From Weymouth's New Testament: "Who therefore is the loyal and intelligent servant to whom his master has entrusted the control of his household to give them their rations at the appointed time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes shall find so doing! In solemn truth I tell you that he will give him the management of all his wealth."

From these different translations why is the servant selected? The servant is one that can be trusted because he is faithful, loyal, prudent and wise.

The translation though that jumped out at me and gives us another line of reasoning as to why the household of faith should continue to use the resources provided by our returned Lord through That Servant is the Phillips translation.

"Who then is the faithful and sensible servant whom his master put in charge of his household to give others their food at the proper time? Well, he is fortunate if his master finds him doing that duty on his return! Believe me, he will promote him to

look after all his property.”

Here we see a principle of divine government. One that has been faithful with a little responsibility will be promoted to a position of greater responsibility, in due time. We have this principle taught in other scriptures also.

Luke 16:10 Our Lord said, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.”

Luke 19:15-26, This is the parable of the King dealing with his servants at his return. Those servants that had faithfully used the resources they had been given were rewarded with greater responsibilities.

According to the timing of God's plan it would be due time for the distribution of all Lord's goods to the household of faith at the time of the second advent of his Son. Our Lord knowing his Father's plan therefore posed the question as to who would get the great privilege of distributing the Lord's goods at that point in time and then he answered, one that was already faithfully serving others, that is the one that would get the promotion.

I know that there has been much speculation as to when Bro. Russell was selected as That Servant. This point in my mind separates him from all others, that I am aware of, even by October 1874.

Are these the only reasons why the household of faith should continue to use the resources provided through That Servant? Is there a higher reason? Who are these resources really from and who are we therefore honoring when we avail ourselves of them?

What did Jehovah say to Samuel when the nation of Israel desired an earthly King to rule over them instead of having God as their King and Judges as his representatives? His words are recorded for us in 1 Samuel 8:7 “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”

How do we show God that we Love him and that we want him to be the ultimate ruler in our lives? Can we physically do anything for him personally to demonstrate this Love and desire? No, he is so far beyond us. Yet we believe that he exists and we love and serve Him, how?

Time does not permit us to read the Apostle John's great treatise on Love that leads all that possess it to fullness of Joy. This is the letter designated 1 John. I

know you are all familiar with this letter so we only consider the part that gets to the point we are seeking to make.

1John 4:19-21 “We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”

Does this principle apply also to how we can demonstrate our Love for Christ and our desire to have him as our head? Yes it does. His own words are recorded for us in John 13:20: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.”

Just as in the case of Israel, God and our Lord see a direct relationship therefore between our love and respect for them and our love and respect for the servant our Lord chose at his return.

But someone cries, “You are worshiping Bro. Russell, you are putting him on a pedestal”. It is true that the Lord through the angel of Revelation who shows the John class these wonderful things taught us that we should not worship the angel, the messenger, he was a fellow servant like us. Bro. Russell clearly demonstrated this attitude. He took no credit for the message, claiming it was due time and that he was merely being used as a finger of the Lord to point others to the message that each could prove for themselves in the Word of God. To continue to promote Bro. Russell though and the message provided through him who can we possibly injure? Bro. Russell? Is there any reason to fear that we might inadvertently cause him to think more highly of himself than he ought to and put him at risk of falling from his position of a faithful servant? It is not possible. He has already finished his course and gave every evidence that he was faithful even unto death.

I have often thought that we live at the most wonderful time in the Church's history and yet perhaps the most dangerous time in the Church's history to be an elder, a teacher, to the fully consecrated children of God.

The most wonderful time because none in this position need feel the burden and responsibility of being an eye for the present body members. That role was fulfilled by the Apostles at the first of the age and we still have their written words available to us today and down at the end of the age the Lord has given us a servant and through that servant we have received all of his goods, his possessions, his substance, his wealth, his property.

Even if we should see any measure of the eye quality in any of our servants today

we can be sure that if they are faithfully using that talent they are doing so in harmony with the message already provided by our returned Lord through Bro. Russell. We actually do not learn anything new from such nor would they feel they are being used to bring out anything new.

I do not have that talent brethren and I am quite happy to be at best a hand dispensing what Bro. Russell was used to prepare. As long as others continue to be interested in the same food and the Lord continues to bless me with the time and talent to serve others in this capacity and gives such opportunities, I am happy to be of service. Even if I had no such opportunities though or came to the point where there was no one left who was interested in the message any longer it would not change my conviction or my thankfulness to God and to our Lord for the wonderful privilege of coming into contact with his people and through them this wonder body of information we call "present truth" received at the hands of our Lord's chosen servant, Br. Russell.

Now why is this potentially the most dangerous time to be an elder, a teacher, to the household of faith? I believe we are still in the hour of temptation and the adversary is still permitted to bring strong delusions and there is ever the temptation to get up something new. We call this the itching ear quality. As a man I know something about this itching ear from a natural standpoint. As we get older there seems to be this strange phenomenon associated with the aging of these human bodies. Many of us begin to lose hair where we need it the most and it starts growing everywhere we need it the least, especially on and in the ears.

How do we apply this spiritually though? As one matures more and more in the truth, the hair which pictures our consecration elsewhere in the scriptures can start to cause a little itching in our spiritual ears if it gets a little misdirected and self will starts to enter the picture. We can begin to think that we have a sensitivity to hear things that others are not able to hear because they have not reached the same level of maturity.

What is the solution if any of us should see this in ourselves? We must get rid of what is causing the ears to itch. We must get back in line with the consecration that was made at the very first and desire no will but that of our Lord and head. From the natural standpoint that can be a painful and difficult task. There is nothing more stubborn, more fixed, more wiry, then the hair that grows on or in the ears. And though some may want to help us at times with the task, we have to do this ourselves for the rest of our lives because this tendency is not going to go away. This is true of the new creature also, it will take continual effort to resist this tendency. Remember brethren we must be faithful even unto death.

What if someone is not making the effort themselves? From the natural standpoint

this is something that becomes obvious to everyone that person encounters. At best we can by word and action suggest that some maintenance is needed. Amongst the new creation it is the same, we cannot take it upon ourselves to do the maintenance but at best we can make suggestions and might even decline to ask such to be one of our servants if such a condition becomes outwardly obvious to everyone even if the person themselves simply cannot see it. No true brother in Christ has ever be injured by not being elected to serve as an elder nor would their authority to preach the word guaranteed to all, Brothers and Sisters alike, by the anointing of the holy spirit be diminished or their privilege of serving the Lord in other capacities be hindered (if the Lord should open such doors of opportunity). The election of elders is the responsibility of the ecclesia. No Brother ever elects himself to serve as an elder. The ecclesia is accountable therefore if they fail do their duty and continue to put themselves and their brother at risk by encouraging an itching ear.

Failing to do our duty, we would also fail to properly show our love to the Brother, our Lord and ultimately to our Father because we would be allowing his message, his word, to become polluted in some measure.

Now this is a rare event, as noted we already have all the Lords goods and almost universally there is a healthy respect and honor given Bro. Russell and his writings, the source of these goods. All the brethren that I personally have contact with demonstrate a similar level of appreciation.

This brings us to the second part of our considerations today that is - how should the household of faith therefore continue to use the resources provided by our returned Lord through that servant?

This seems to be the area that causes the greatest challenge amongst the household of faith as they seek to interact and build one another up in this most holy faith. Due to what seems to be regional interpretations or emphasis placed on one part of the message over another, difficulties can arise and communication on the truth can break down between groups. In our own experiences this can even come down to the ecclesia level and matters become so strained that a division occurs. Should a division occur, the effect for both sides is an immediate relief and rejoicing again in the fellowship and study of the truth and feeling therefore that they are on the right side of the issue and the Lord is blessing them. What each group fails to see is the same effect taking place in the other group.

An unfortunate side affect that can occur is that as one feels the blessing of the Lord and assumes the others are as miserable as before the division occurred the idea can enter in that the others are therefore being unfaithful and that they are on the slippery slope out of the truth, into the great company or worse on their way to

second death. Brethren, I am not speculating here, I have had such thoughts in the past and I am not proud of it at all.

I had to admit and bare my share of the responsibility for such thoughts and the conduct that lead to them even though quite immature at the time. A few of us in those events could claim immaturity as a factor but not all, these thoughts and the conduct that leads to them was encouraged both in word and deed by others that should have known better. Brethren these things ought not to be. Though, it is not my position to judge others I have thought much over the years as to what has been the source of these thoughts and have done all in my power to counter them in myself and others.

This is not an easy task because as far as I can tell from my travels and fellowship with brethren all over the US, Canada and now around the world due to the Internet this type of thinking can be found everywhere, and it persists in some cases very strongly. Viewed in this light I do not think anyone would admit that this is a particularly loving and spiritually edifying way to think so who do you think has been the source?

We might examine ourselves and conclude that I do not think of or view my brethren in that way at all. This would be a good start for self examination. In my own case though I needed to dig a little deeper to get at the root of what caused the problem in the first place that led to such extreme actions and thoughts.

What I found dear brethren is directly related to how I was using the resources provided by our returned Lord through That Servant, Br. Russell. I thought I was using the sword of the truth defensively supposedly showing the Lord my fidelity to the truth and that I could therefore be trusted. What I found is that I was often using the sword of the truth offensively and unfortunately was probably doing more injury then good. Now someone might think that I was being too hard on myself in my self-examinations because my outward conduct and demeanor would not have been particularly offensive or suggested such intentions. It was not the outward man I was examining, and it is not a good indicator in any case sense we all are so varied in our personalities and dispositions.

This point was impressed upon me when reading Reprint 5698 entitled GENTLENESS - A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHRIST. Bro. Russell used 2 Timothy 2:24-25 as the basis of the article: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."

Though this thought was written to Timothy and might be seen to be particularly applicable to anyone in a teaching capacity Bro. Russell makes this statement in

the first sentence of the 2nd paragraph “Our text is applicable to any servant of God, any member of the Church of Christ, whether he holds office among the brethren or not. It is an injunction which applies to all of the Church. Every spirit-begotten child of God is to teach according to his opportunity and ability, under the limitations of sex, etc., given in the Scriptures.”

The first subheading of the article is: PROPER MANNER OF PRESENTING THE TRUTH. The second subheading of the article is: QUALIFICATION OF A TRUE TEACHER

I will quote the last paragraph of the article: “Undoubtedly the Lord's people are learning more and more the lesson inculcated in our text-- the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all. It is a lesson that all must learn, Elders and Deacons and every member of the Body of Christ. It is necessary to our own character-building, and necessary in order that we may do more effective service for the Master. When at first we buckled on the armor and took up the Sword of the Spirit, we probably did some flourishing, and perhaps often did more harm than good. We felt that we had something that no one could argue down. But we have been learning to be more gentle, more wise, more patient, more loving; and thus we have become better qualified to be instructors of others. We have seen how we may injure the Cause of the Lord by a wrong presentation of the Truth, and how by proper presentation we may become more successful in doing the Lord's work, in reaching hungry hearts, and more pleasing to our great King, whom we all love and long to serve.”

“When at first we buckled on the armor and took up the Sword of the Spirit, we probably did some flourishing, and perhaps often did more harm than good.”

Based on this thought it would be easy to think this could only occur when we are young in the truth and immature and would have to do with our presentation of the truth to others outside our fellowship.

Let us use another analogy that I believe fits how this can occur within our fellowship regardless of the length of years in the truth. This analogy probably fits better and in it I think that we can see the same attitude can develop in us regardless of how long we have been in the truth and we can end up using the sword of the spirit against one another as brethren. I have been guilty of the very things illustrated by the analogy I am going to share. This comes from self examination.

I call this the Baseball analogy or if you prefer, it could also be called the Cricket analogy. We will use Bro. A and Bro. B as our participants in this game.

Bro. A is going to be the pitcher (bowler in Cricket) and over the years Bro. A has developed his favorite pitch when it comes to the discussion of a particular topic. He has his scripture references and comments from Bro. Russell ready and his delivery is smooth.

Bro. B is the batter (batsman in Cricket) and over the years Bro. B has honed and conditioned his favorite bat when it comes to the same topic. He has his references ready and they have never failed to hit any opposing pitch out of the park.

Now Bro. A and Bro. B. sit down to talk one day and the topic comes up. Not very far into the discussion it becomes apparent that they have a difference in their understanding and the game begins.

Bro. A winds up and he throws his favorite pitch on the topic and the logic and delivery (in his own opinion) is flawless. No one is going to hit that pitch.

Bro. B being the skilled batter that he is and already somewhat familiar with Bro. A's favorite pitch (based on the scouting reports he has received from some very trusted sources) he sees the pitch coming even before the ball leaves the hand of Bro. A, that is before Bro. A completes his thought Bro. B is getting ready to swing. Finally, the opportunity to speak arrives and Bro. B swings his favorite bat confident that he is going to knock Br. A's argument out of the park.

To both of their surprise the pitch glances off of Bro. B's bat and goes foul. Bro. A does not get a strike and Bro. B does not get a hit. For both of them this had never happened before.

Bro. A stops and thinks for a minute and realizing he does not have a different pitch he winds up and throws the same pitch again (this time a little harder) and Bro. B swings the same bat again (in turn a little harder) and the results are the same a foul ball. No one gets any advantage over the other.

Do you get the picture brethren as to what happens next? This continues to go on and on and on. Bro. A throwing the same pitch and Bro. B swinging the same bat.

This obviously cannot go on forever so tiring of the game Bro. B decides to switch bats and brings out the bat that is so big he simply cannot miss. Br. A winds up one last time and Bro. B swings the big bat saying, "Brother, I see what you are saying but I believe what Bro. Russell wrote." In Bro. B's mind he hears the loud crack of the bat sending Bro. A's argument out of the park, suggesting that Bro. A's position on the subject is not in harmony with the 7th messenger, That Servant of Matt 24, the man with the writer's ink horn, the one who stood upon the

Watchtower, etc, etc. Home run, game over, no need to ever discuss that subject again.

Ever been there and done that. Does this only happen to babes in Christ?

What is terribly wrong with this picture? Shouldn't we at least be on the same team and start our discussions by viewing each other as team mates instead of opponents. I am embarrassed to say that I have been both the pitcher and the batter in this game in times past, as well a member of the dugout trying to encourage my player who is engaged in the game or afterwards in the clubhouse reassuring my player that there was nothing wrong with their pitch or their batting skills. I have to fight the tendency but I refuse to consciously participate in this game any longer. I do not even like to sit in the bleachers and when I see this occurring I just try to walk away. It is a fruitless exercise and brings no honor to Br. Russell, our Lord or the God whom we seek to serve.

Brethren as comical as this analogy might be this is an improper wielding of the sword of the spirit, an improper use of the wonderful resources supplied by our returned Lord through Bro. Russell and if Bro. Russell were still with us today I believe he would be the loudest critic of such unsportsmanlike like conduct. In fact there are numerous references in Bro. Russell's writings that discourage this approach to discussing the truth and encourage great liberty of thought on a wide range of subjects allowing for differences in maturity and background all the while striving for a unity of the spirit that works to see all points of truth as closely as possible without undue force or pressure.

Of the brethren that I fellowship around the world I have no doubt that they see Bro. Russell as that servant the one the Lord chose to give the household of faith meat in due season and even where differences exist over the understanding of prophecy that may have even lead to divisions in times past their lives give abundant evidence that they have not gone out of the truth, that they have not lost the Lord's spirit or that they are failing to lay down their lives in full consecration to the Lord largely through the service of their consecrated brethren and the broader household of faith.

This does not mean that we see eye to eye on everything and some matters may be so divergent that I would be reluctant to sit under one as a teacher (and I am sure the feeling is mutual in some cases). In such cases though I still consider them to be my brethren and seek to fellowship with them along the lines we can while patiently and gently approaching subjects where some difference may exist and at least starting a dialog not expecting to convince anyone but hoping that we can in time come to mutually edifying position on the subject.

May the Lord bless you likewise as you avail yourself of the resources our

returned Lord has provided through Br. Russell and work to make your own calling and election sure and help your brethren to the same end.