

LABOR DAY! REST DAY! THE LABORER AND HIS HIRE

(Discourse given by Pastor Russell, at Niagara Falls Convention, September 2, 1907.
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Various Labors, Various Wages—Choosing Our Labor We Are Choosing the Wages Attached Thereto—The Necessity for Wise Choice—Some Egregious Mistakes—Need for the Wisdom From Above in Deciding—Divine Counsel in the Divine Word—The Rest That Remaineth

3 P.M.—Brother Russell spoke in the International Opera House, from the text, “The Laborer is worthy of his hire.” (Luke 10:7.)

As tomorrow will be celebrated as Labor Day, and as the Lord’s calls are to those who labor and are heavy laden, it will not be inappropriate for us to consider the subject from the Scriptural standpoint. While the Scriptures do not lay down a fixed rate of compensation for labor, they do indicate both in the Old Testament and in the New, as in our text, that labor should have its reward. And the word “hire” in our text seems to carry with it the thought of a bargain or contract between the laborer and the employer, which should be lived up to on both sides. From this point of view all that anybody gets for his laboring is his food, and raiment and shelter, luxurious or otherwise. But from another standpoint none should labor for these things alone. In order to happiness there must additionally be a hope of improvement, of betterment. Whoever labors hopelessly, dejectedly, is worthy of our commiseration and needs our assistance that he may enjoy life at least a little. It may safely be set down that the hopeless life is a joyless life. It may also be safely concluded that the hopeful are the ambitious, and that the ambitious are the progressive workers of the world in all departments of industry. Here then lies the difficulty with the vast majority of the race—hopelessness, stupidity, ignorance, blind them to any better prospects, and their toil therefore is doubly weighty upon them, and the supply of their daily needs is proportionately disesteemed as an unsatisfactory wage for their labor. It is the hopeful and the ambitious that are courageous and successful and they are a small minority of the whole.

Since, then, the hopeful are the happy, all true philanthropists will be glad to encourage hopefulness in all of his fellow creatures. The bright, intelligent eye speaks to us of hope, whether we see it in the workman, in the merchant, in the lady or in the housemaid. One is hoping for domestic happiness with his or her family, another hopes for name or fame or wealth, and all of these may properly be counted in as part of the laborer’s wage and should be sought and appreciated and cultivated.

But some may say, I had hope but it is crushed out, it was killed. My business prospects were seemingly good at one time, but they have all been blasted. Another remarks, I have lost hope of any advancement in my trade; others brighter than myself are far ahead of me; it must be mine to plod along hopelessly. I could long for the end of life's journey were I sure that it would be better. These hopeless conditions apply to three-fourths or more of the adults of the world and of the remaining one-fourth the great majority will ultimately reach the same despair before they die, as comparatively few really attain to the earthly hopes and ambitions and prospects they set before themselves.

The Laboring and Heavy Laden

Of all the books in the world, the Bible is the one which enters sympathetically into the conditions of the race and offers cheer and comfort to the hopeless classes we have already described. It addresses itself primarily, not to the ambitious and hopeful, but to the laboring and heavy laden and despairing. And to as many as hear and hearken to its voice it brings rest, peace, a new hope. But why does not the Bible especially address the hopeful, the ambitious, the progressives? Ah! it is because these have little or no ear to hear the divine message so long as their earthly hopes and ambitions are so bright and glorious before them. It is when these earthly hopes become blighted that they get the ear to hear the message from "Him that speaketh from heaven," saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden [despised and grief-stricken], and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matt. 11:28, 29.) Thus it is that the Scriptures everywhere declare that amongst those responding to the Lord's call in this present time not many wise, not many great, not many learned, not many rich are called, but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith. The rich, learned, wise are the hopeful, the ambitious, the progressive of the present time, who feel not their need of sympathy and direction and aid. They see their own way or think they do, and are following that which they believe will bring them the greatest joy—the prosperity which they covet, name, fame, earthly ease, luxury, etc.

When our Lord declares that the laborer is worthy of his hire, he expresses a general principle of justice. There are two great hirers or employers into whose service mankind may go—God and Mammon—and each one who hires out should properly consider the wages offered. Mammon makes great professions of what it will give—honor, dignity, wealth, etc.—all things of the present life; it has nothing to promise as respects the future. On the other hand, God is now inviting some to become His servants and He makes very plain the terms and conditions, present and future, of those who shall accept His service. He tells them that to be His servants will cost them the renouncement of the pleasures of sin. More than this, it will cost self-denial even in respect to things not sinful. It will also bring against the Lord's servants more or less of the animosity of the world and of the great Adversary. "Marvel not if the world hate you; ye know that it hated me before it hated you. He that would be my disciple let him take up his cross and follow Me." Here

are some of the distinct propositions of the Lord respecting the wages that will come to those who will enter His service—they must endure hardness as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus.

But must they serve to the extent of sacrifice and without compensation? No! The Lord has promised compensation—that He will provide the things needful as respects the present life, though He in no wise engages to give more than bread and water—whatsoever is more than this is that much more than the contrast between God and His servants. But He does promise more in the way of hope. He promises that now, in this present time, His servants shall have in their hearts the peace of God which passeth all understanding. He promises further that the difficulties and trials of life shall constitute to these supervised experience under divine discipline and care, which will work in us a development of character deepening and broadening our hearts, and enabling us to appropriate more and more the peace of God and the love of God and the character of God in our thoughts and words and doings. But, more than this, God gives to those who accept His invitation most glorious hopes respecting the everlasting future. He points out to these that the present life is but a schooling period anyway, and that to the faithful alone eternal experience remains, as eternity of rest, an eternity of joy, an eternity of divine favor and blessing. More than this, the Apostle declares he has given us “exceedingly great and precious promises”—that be these we might become

“Partakers of the Divine Nature”

It is when the Lord’s servants begin to get a glimpse of these exceeding great and precious promises that have to do with the coming eternity that they begin to realize in true measure the love of God shed abroad in their hearts. Thenceforth, so long as they maintain this attitude of heart, old things are passed away and all things become new—they care comparatively little for the things of the present life, since their aims and objects now are centered in the glorious things of the heavenly kingdom. Instead of laboring for some petty office or an earthly kind, they now perceive that in accepting the Captaincy of the Lord Jesus they have become heirs with Him in His glory, honor and immortality, and associates with Him in His throne, His Kingdom, when it shall have been established. Instead of laboring for riches of an earthly kind, that would so likely take wings and fly away, they have now learned of the true riches of character and of the divine blessings which are, as the Apostle explains, an anchor to their souls, sure and steadfast, entering into that which is within the vail.—Heb. 6:19.

It will be seen, then, that there are two general classes of laborers—the world in general laboring for the things of the present life, and having little knowledge, and almost no faith in respect to the things of the world to come. Of these we have seen that the vast majority are in a comparatively hopeless and despondent condition. On the other hand we find a new set of laborers in the world, the followers of the Lord Jesus, composed of those drawn from the ranks of the broken-hearted and discouraged children of this world,

servants of Mammon. These have received new hopes, new ambitions, new peace, new joys, which far transcend any that they ever previously had, and all that Mammon has to offer to its most successful votaries. They are still laborers, and indeed, in some respects, their labors may be as difficult as at any time in the past; but they have found the great Helper and have realized the meaning of His words, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest." Their coming to the Master meant a great transformation of heart and of ambition, of motive, and they are continually being more and more blessed as they hearken to His voice and learn the good lessons whereby He prepares them for future glories, honors, immortality. A summary of all this is expressed in the words, "Labor not for the meat that perisheth" (John 6:27)—the present life and its present transitory interests—but labor for that which endureth unto life eternal. We hearken again and hear the same message through the Prophet of old, saying, Wherefore do ye spend your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.—Isa. 65:2

"They Have Their Reward"

But there is a great difference between being truly the Lord's servants and being such merely in an outward, superficial way. It is necessary to point out that while Christians are numbered according to the census at a total of 400,000,000, the real genuine followers of the Lord are represented in the Scriptures as being only a "little flock"—not many. And with this Scriptural delineation our judgments and experiences are in harmony, for truly we know of but few who are even seeking to "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"—to be "not conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds"—walking in the footsteps of Jesus, gladly sharing in the sufferings of Christ for the prospect of having ultimately a share with Him in His glorious Kingdom. There have been true and false in every age, and hence what we are saying is not a reflection merely against our own conditions. In our Lord's day He called attention to the fact that some very prominent among those professing to be God's servants were some who made long prayers for a pretense, who gave alms with a similar purpose in view—of having honor of men, of being thought holy. Our Lord declared of them, "They have their reward"—they get the reward which they were seeking, namely, the praise and approval of their fellow creatures. They were not really God's servants, but servants of Mammon, servants of selfishness, who had put on the livery of the Lord and were pretending to be His. They were seeking an earthly reward of Mammon, and that they got. Hence their labor getting its reward in this manner; they had nothing laid up for them as a treasure in heaven; they got what they were working for, and that was earthly honor of men. That there are many enrolled in Church membership to-day of a similar class can scarcely be doubted, many who draw nigh to the Lord with their lips while their hearts are far from Him, many who are children of this world while wearing the garb of the children of the Kingdom, many that are tares, imitations of the wheat, the true children of the Kingdom.

Whatever we are, let us not be hypocritical; let us not think to deceive the Lord, who knoweth and readeth the heart, and who tells us through the Apostle, “His servants ye are to whom ye render service.” (Rom. 6:16.) If we are really living for the present life alone, let us not pretend otherwise, but remember that an honest servant of Mammon is much more respectable from the Lord’s standpoint than one who dishonestly professes to be a servant of the great King. Whatever we are let us be truthful—we cannot deceive God; let us not deceive our own hearts. Let us be content then to be misunderstood by the world, misrepresented by the hypocrite class, if thereby we have fellowship with the Lord and have the privilege of walking in His steps and the glorious promise of by and by sharing His likeness as members of His Bride and sharers with Him in His millennial kingdom.

Our text applies to this feature of the subject, too—the laborer is worthy of his hire. The hypocritical desiring the approval and smile of the world and the prosperity of this present time gets the reward sought in some measure at least, though not always. The god of this world cannot be relied upon thoroughly in regard to any promises. As respects the servants of God all of these who will prove worthy by their faithfulness will find their God faithful and His word of promise sure—faithful is He who has called us, who also will do for us exceedingly and abundantly more than we could have asked or thought. Our hire, then, we are to remember, is in this present life, trials, difficulties, sacrifices as respects earthly things; but the divine favor and blessing upon our hearts, upon us as New Creatures, and our faith and hope beyond the veil, constitute the chief elements of our wage. Could all the servants of God, from the humblest member of the Church of Christ, up to and including the most honorably engaged in the public ministries of the Lord’s Word—if all these could but have in mind what constituted the wage, the hire that the Lord has promised them, there would be but comparatively little expectancy of great favors or strife therefore, but a contentment with the Lord’s provision—with a realization that He knows the things we have need of before we ask Him, and that He is both able and willing to give us the things most expedient for our welfare, the things which will help us best in the attainment of the exceeding great and precious promises which are the main part of our wage—the portion most encouraging to us, most stimulating—for which we really live and on account of which all other things are to be counted as but loss and dross.

Labor to Enter Rest

The Apostle calls attention to the fact that those who have become the Lord’s consecrated followers have by faith already entered into rest by trusting in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf, by realizing that through His sacrifices God has made provision for the forgiveness of our sins and our acceptance by Himself. This indeed gives a rest and a peace and a joy which the world could not appreciate, which the world can neither give nor take away. All this, however, is a rest of faith only and not an actual rest. The Apostle differentiates between this rest of the present time, into which believers have

already entered, and that rest of the future which is in reservation for them that love God. He says of the latter rest, that remaineth for the people of God—“Let us labor, therefore, to enter into His rest,” and again—“Let us fear lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of us should seem to come short of it”—Heb. 4:1, 11.

Here then are the two thoughts respecting labor. In one sense the Christian ceases from labor when he by faith accepts the Lord Jesus. In a word, he accepts the fact that he was not worthy of eternal life, but that the merit of Christ has made up for his deficiency. No longer need he labor to do the impossible thing, for all that was on our part impossible has been done for us by the Redeemer, and is imputed to us who believe. The believer's reconciliation to the Father is effected through faith, by which he lays hold upon the work already accomplished on his behalf. But therewith the consecration of himself to the Lord begins a new work—not a work of justification, but a work of schooling, a work of grace, a work of development of heart and of head and of talents in the service of the One who redeemed him and set him free from the slavery of sin and death. He has entered into a contract to serve the Heavenly Father with all his powers, and so surely as he remains loyal to the Father and His covenant, he is guaranteed grace to help in every time of need. (Heb. 4:16) It is for the consecrated believer, however, to demonstrate his loyalty by his works, by his endeavor to do his Father's will, and different degrees of blessings have been promised to the faithful overcomers and also special blessings to the still more self-sacrificing, styled the “more than conquerors.” (Rom. 8:37) Both are to get eternal life, but the latter are to have it in association with the Redeemer as the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and joint-heir in the Kingdom. Thus the Apostle says that by our labors in the Lord's service we are to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.” Our labors will have to do with the grandeur of the salvation which will be bestowed upon us, for, as the Apostle again declares, the saved will differ “as star differeth from star in glory”.

Both of the classes of the saved ones just mentioned must labor, must demonstrate their loyalty to God and to the principles of righteousness, by fighting a good fight of faith, striving against sin and laying down their lives for the brethren—for the Lord's cause. Hence, as is declared, we must labor if we would enter into the rest which remains for the people of God. But this labor, as we have already seen, is a different one from that which the unjustified world is occupied in. Our labor is in connection with the Father's work—“I must work the works of Him that sent me.” (John 9:4) We are not laboring for ourselves, but for the cause of the Lord, including the cause of all that are His. If any man after being justified through faith and after making a consecration to do the Father's will shall fail to labor in this manner, it demonstrates that he has not the proper appreciation of the Father's favors nor of his own consecration vow. Such will not enter into his rest—such will be proving themselves at heart disloyal to the principles of righteousness for which God stands, and if disloyal to God and righteousness the only provision for them will be the Second Death. So, then, the better we understand the

situation the more thoroughly do we concur with the Apostle's exhortation, "Let us labor that we may enter into His rest."

"God Will Not Forget Your Labor"

Many of the Lord's children, realizing their own insufficiency and the Lord's greatness, realizing the small value of anything they can do to directly glorify the Lord or to promote the interests of His cause, are inclined to feel discouraged, and to say within themselves, if not to others: When the Lord shall decide my case I fear that He will find no labor in service accomplished for His cause—no ground for saying to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joys of thy Lord." But we remind such that if they are doing with their might what their hands find to do they could not do more, and the Lord is not asking more than they are able to do. He is quite able to do the entire work Himself. But what He does seek in us is the loyalty of heart, the desire, the effort to serve Him and His cause of righteousness. We remind them that in connection with the very Scripture quoted, the Lord not only declares that He will reward the good and faithful servant, but He adds, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things." The intimation is that none of the Lord's people have been or could be faithful over many things—that only a few things are committed to any of us, and that the Lord is seeking merely to note our disposition and to reward us accordingly.

We remind these faithful but timid ones again of the Lord's message through the Apostle, saying, "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have served the saints and still do serve them." (Heb. 6:10) And again He still more particularly shows that there are two classes of labor to be rewarded, an active and a passive. He says: "Call to remembrance the former days, in the which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; some being made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and some becoming partakers with them who were so used." (Heb. 10:32, 33) Here we note the Lord's benevolence, in that He is willing to count as His servants and laborers to whom He will give a reward not only those who were actively in the conflict, sufferers for righteousness' sake, but also to count in with them and to reward with them others who, themselves suffering nothing, were loyal to the principles of righteousness to the extent that they stood with and acknowledged and upheld the cause of the Lord and those who were His, and who suffered for righteousness' sake. What a gracious arrangement we have here! It shows us that the slightest labor that we can perform in the cause of our Master will be accepted of Him and bring us a share of His ultimate blessing. With such inducements, who has a proper appreciation of the Lord and His goodness would not desire to lay down his life in His service?

The intimation of the Scriptures everywhere is that the Lord's people are to be active. "Instant in season and out of season," using time and talents in the Lord's service and to the Master's praise. They show us that the present life is all one of activity and labor,

looking for the rest of the people of God in the future—except that measure of rest which we have by faith, and which enables us to rejoice even in the trials and difficulties of life, and to even count afflictions as unworthy of consideration because of the joys of our faith. I exhort you, then, that we rest from all sin and from all attempts to justify ourselves, that as we have accepted Christ Jesus our Lord, so we continue to rest in Him, the rest of faith, and that we continue to labor to the extent of laying down our lives for the Lord and His cause, and that thus being found faithful as laborers we shall ultimately be granted a participation in the glorious honors of the Kingdom.

If there is any one power in the world that will make itself felt, it is character. There may be little culture and slender abilities, yet if there be a character of sterling excellence, it will demand influence and secure respect.

Question Meeting conducted by Brother Russell at Norfolk, Virginia.
1907 Convention Report, Part II, page 111.

Question 20—Comparing the spiritual with the natural birth, what manifestations should we expect at the begetting and what at the quickening?

Answer—I would say that in comparing the spiritual begetting with the natural begetting, we would not expect much of any kind of manifestation at the begetting. It is a fact that it does take place, and the demonstration is found later, and so, if we are begotten of the Holy Spirit, we may have some consciousness of it, but the outward demonstration would not be very marked to anybody else; there would possibly be some manifestation to others; it would be the quickening, the energizing motion that would be the indication of a personal life. So when we are begotten of the Holy Spirit it quickens our mortal bodies, energizes us in the Lord's service, and we begin to have the love that moves and wants to serve God and the brethren, and to do good to all men as we have opportunity.