

These tracts are classics of Gospel Truth that readers of J. C. Ryle have come to expect from all his writings. His tracts are "pure gold." I offer you some of these inspiring tracts exactly word for word as they were first published by Drummond's Tract Depot, Stirling, Scotland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## “OCCUPY TILL I COME.”

by  
**J. C. Ryle**

LUKE XIX. 11-13.

*“And as they heard these things he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.*

*“He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.*

*“ And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, OCCUPY TILL I COME.”*

READER,

The words before your eyes form an introduction to the parable, which is commonly called the “Parable of the Pounds.” They contain matter which deserves the prayerful consideration of every true Christian in the present day.

There are some parables of which Matthew Henry says, with equal quaintness and truth, “The key hangs beside the door.” The Holy Ghost himself interprets them. There is no room left for doubt as to the purpose for which they were spoken. Of such parables the parable of the Pounds is an example.

St. Luke tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ *added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.”*

These words reveal to us the secret thoughts of our Lord’s disciples at this period of His ministry. They were drawing nigh to Jerusalem. They gathered from many of their Master’s sayings, that something remarkable was about to happen; they had a strong impression that one great end of His coming into the world was about to be accomplished: so far they were quite right. As to the precise nature of the event about to happen they were quite wrong.

Reader, there are three subjects opened up in the passage of Scripture, which appear to me to be of the deepest importance. Upon each of these I wish to offer a few thoughts for your private meditation. I purposely abstain from touching any part of the parable except the beginning. I want to direct your attention to the three following points.

I. I will speak of the mistake of the disciples, referred to in the verses before us.

II. I will speak of the present position of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. I will speak of the present duty of all who profess to be Jesus Christ’s disciples.

May God bless the reading of this tract to every one into whose hands it may fall. May every reader be taught to pray that the Spirit will guide him into all truth.

I. I will first speak of *the mistake into which the disciples had fallen*.

What was this mistake? Let us try to understand this point clearly. With what feelings ought Christians in the present day to regard this mistake? Let us try to understand this clearly also.

Our Lord's disciples seem to have thought that the Old Testament promises of Messiah's visible kingdom and glory were about to be immediately fulfilled. They believed rightly that He was indeed the Messiah,—the Christ of God. But they blindly supposed that He was going at once to take to Himself His great power, and reign gloriously over the earth. This was the sum and substance of their error.

They appear to have concluded that now was the day and now the hour when the Redeemer would build up Zion, and appear in His glory (Ps.cii. 16),—when He would smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips slay the wicked,—when He would assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah (Isaiah xi. 4, 12),—when He would take the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession,—break His enemies with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psalm ii. 8, 9),—when He would reign in mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously? (Isaiah xxiv. 23),—when the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven would be given to the saints of the Most High. (Dan. vii. 27.) Such appears to have been the mistake into which our Lord's disciples had fallen at the time when He spoke the parable of the Pounds.

It was *a great mistake* unquestionably. They did not realize that before all these prophecies could be fulfilled, "it behoved Christ to suffer." (Luke xxiv. 46.) Their sanguine expectations overleaped the crucifixion and the long parenthesis of time to follow, and bounded onward to the final glory. They did not see that there was to be a first advent of Messiah "to be cut off," before the second advent of Messiah to reign. They did not perceive that the sacrifices and ceremonies of the law of Moses were first to receive their fulfilment in a better sacrifice and a better high priest, and the shedding of blood more precious than that of bulls and goats. They did not comprehend that before the glory Christ must be crucified, and an elect people gathered out from among the Gentiles by the preaching of the Gospel. All these were dark things to them. They grasped part of the prophetic word, but not all. They saw that Christ was to have a kingdom, but they did not see that He was to be wounded and bruised, and be an offering for sin. They understood the end of the second Psalm, and the whole of the ninety-seventh and ninety-eighth, but not the beginning of the twenty-second. They understood the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, but not the fifty-third. They understood the dispensation of the crown and the glory, but not the dispensation of the cross and the shame. Such was their mistake.

It was a mistake which you will find partially *clinging to the disciples even after the crucifixion*. You see it creeping forth in the first days of the Church between the resurrection and the ascension. They said, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"\* (Acts i. 6.) You have it referred to by St. Paul: "Be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter

as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there be a falling away first.” (2 Thess. ii. 2.) In both these instances the old Jewish leaven peeps out. In both you see the same tendency to misunderstand God’s purposes,—to overlook the dispensation of the crucifixion, and to concentrate all thought on the dispensation of the kingdom. In both you see the same disposition to neglect the duties of the present order of things.—Those duties are to bear the cross after Christ, to take part in the afflictions of the Gospel, to work, to witness, to preach, and to help to gather out a people for the Lord.

It was a mistake, however, which I frankly say, I think we Gentile believers are bound to regard with much tenderness and consideration. It will not do to run down our Jewish brethren as “carnal” and earthly-minded in their interpretation of prophecy, as if we Gentiles had never made any mistake at all. I think we have made great mistakes, and it is high time that we should confess it.

I believe we have fallen into an error parallel with that of our Jewish brethren,—an error less fatal in its consequences than theirs, but an error far more inexcusable, because we have had more light. If the Jew thought too exclusively of Christ reigning, has not the Gentile thought too exclusively of Christ suffering? If the Jew could see nothing in Old Testament prophecy but Christ’s exaltation and final power, has not the Gentile often seen nothing but Christ’s humiliation and the preaching of the Gospel? If the Jew dwelt too much on Christ’s second advent, has not the Gentile dwelt too exclusively on the first? If the Jew ignored the cross, has not the Gentile ignored the crown? I believe there can be but one answer to these questions. I believe that we Gentiles till lately have been very guilty concerning a large portion of God’s truth. I believe that we have cherished an arbitrary, reckless habit of interpreting first advent texts *literally*, and second advent texts *spiritually*. I believe we have not rightly understood “all that the prophets have spoken” about the second personal advent of Christ, any more than the Jews did about the first. And because we have done this, I say that we should speak of such mistakes as that referred to in our text, with much tenderness and compassion.

Reader, I earnestly invite your special attention to the point on which I am now dwelling. I know not what your opinions may be about the fulfilment of the prophetic parts of Scripture. I approach the subject with fear and trembling, lest I should hurt the feelings of any dear brother in the Lord. But I ask you in all affection to examine your own views about prophecy. I entreat you to consider calmly whether your opinions about Christ’s second advent and kingdom are as sound and Scriptural as those of His first disciples. I entreat you to take heed, lest insensibly you commit as great error about Christ’s second coming and glory, as they did about Christ’s first coming and cross.

I beseech you not to dismiss the subject which I now press upon your attention, as a matter of curious speculation, and one of no practical importance. Believe me, it affects the whole question between yourself and the unconverted Jew. I warn you, that unless you interpret the prophetic portion of the Old Testament in the simple, literal meaning of its words, you will find it no easy matter to carry on an argument with an unconverted Jew.

You would probably tell the Jew that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. To those Scriptures you would refer him for proof. You would show him Psalm xxii., Isaiah liii., Daniel ix. 26, Micah v. 2, Zechariah ix. 9, and xi. 13. You would tell him that in Jesus of Nazareth those Scriptures were literally fulfilled. You would urge upon him that he ought to believe these Scriptures, and receive Christ as the Messiah. All this is very good. So far you would do well.

But suppose the Jew asks you if you take *all* the prophecies of the old Testament in their simple literal meaning? Suppose he asks you if you believe in a literal personal advent of Messiah to reign over the earth in glory,—a literal restoration of Judah and Israel to Palestine,—a literal rebuilding and restoration of Zion and Jerusalem? Suppose the unconverted Jew puts these questions to you, what answer are you prepared to make?

Will you dare to tell him that Old Testament prophecies of this kind are not to be taken in their plain literal sense? Will you dare to tell him that the words Zion, Jerusalem, Jacob, Judah, Ephraim, Israel, do not mean what they seem to mean, but mean *the Church of Christ*? Will you dare to tell him that the glorious kingdom and future blessedness of Zion, so often dwelt upon in prophecy, mean nothing more than the gradual Christianizing of the world by missionaries and Gospel preaching? Will you dare to tell him that you think it “carnal” to take such Scriptures literally,—“carnal” to expect a literal rebuilding of Jerusalem,—“carnal” to expect a literal coming of Messiah to reign,—“carnal” to look for a literal gathering and restoration of Israel? Oh, reader, if you are a man of this mind, take care what you are doing? I say again, take care.

Do you not see that you are putting a weapon in the hand of the unconverted Jew, which he will probably use with irresistible power? Do you not see that you are cutting the ground from under your own feet, and supplying the Jew with a strong argument for not believing your own interpretation of Scripture? Do you not see that the Jew will reply, that it is “carnal” to tell him that the Messiah *has* come literally to *suffer*, if you tell him that it is “carnal” to expect Messiah to come literally to reign? Do you not see that the Jew will tell you that it is far more “carnal” in you to believe that Messiah could come into the world as a despised, crucified man of sorrows, than it is in him to believe that He will come into the world as a glorious King? Beyond doubt He will do so, and you will find no answer to give.

Reader, I commend these things to your serious attention. I entreat you to throw aside all prejudice, and view the subject I am dwelling upon with calm and dispassionate thought. I beseech you to take up anew the prophetic Scriptures, and pray that you may not err in interpreting their meaning. Read them in the light of those two great pole-stars, the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. Bind up with *the first advent* the rejection of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, the preaching of the Gospel as a witness to the world, and the gathering out of the election of grace. Bind up with *the second advent* the restoration of the Jews, the pouring out of judgments on unbelieving Christians, the conversion of the world, and the establishment of Christ’s kingdom upon earth. Do this, and you will see a meaning and fulness in prophecy which perhaps you never yet discovered.

I am quite aware that many good men do not see the prophetic subject as I do. I am painfully sensible that I seem presumptuous in differing from them. But I dare not refuse anything which appears to me plainly written in Scripture. I consider the best of men are not infallible. I think we should dread Protestant traditions not according to the Bible, as much as the traditions of the Church of Rome.

I believe it is high time for the Church of Christ to awake out of its sleep about Old Testament prophecy. From the time of the old Father, Jerome, down to the present day, men have gone on in a pernicious habit of “spiritualizing” the words of the Prophets, until their true meaning has been well nigh buried. It is high time to lay aside traditional methods of interpretation, and to give up our blind obedience to the opinions of such writers as Poole, Henry, Scott, and Clarke, upon unfulfilled prophecy. It is high time to fall back on the good old principle that Scripture generally means what it seems to mean, and to beware of that semi-sceptical argument, “*such and such an interpretation cannot be correct, because it seems to us “carnal!”*”

It is high time for Christians to interpret unfulfilled prophecy *by the light of prophecies already fulfilled*. The curses on the Jews were brought to pass literally:—so also will be the blessings. The scattering was literal:—so also will be the gathering. The pulling down of Zion was literal:—so also will be the building up. The rejection of Israel was literal:—so also will be the restoration.

It is high time to interpret the events that shall accompany Christ’s second advent *by the light of those accompanying His first advent*. The first advent was literal, visible, personal:—so also will be His second. His first advent was with a literal body:—so also will be His second. At His first advent the least predictions were fulfilled to the very letter:—so also will they be at His second. The shame was literal and visible:—so also will be the glory.

It is high time to cease from explaining Old Testament prophecies *in a way not warranted by the New Testament*. What right have we to say that Judah, Zion, Israel, and Jerusalem, ever mean anything but literal Judah, literal Zion, literal Israel, and literal Jerusalem? What precedent shall we find in the New Testament? Hardly any, if indeed any at all. Well, says an admirable writer on this subject:—“There are really only two or three places in the whole New Testament—Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation—where such names are used decidedly in what may be called a spiritual or figurative state.”—The word “Jerusalem” occurs eighty times, and all of them unquestionably literal, save when the opposite is expressly pointed out by the epithets “heavenly,” or “new,” or “holy.” “Jew” occurs a hundred times, and only four are even ambiguous, as Romans ii. 28. “Israel” and “Israelite” occur forty times, and all literal. “Judah” and “Judea” above twenty times, and all literal. —*Bonar’s “Prophetic Landmarks.” p.300.*

It is no answer to all this to tell us that it is impossible to carry out the principle of a literal interpretation, and that Christ was not a literal “door,” nor a literal “branch,” nor the bread in the sacrament His literal “body.” I reply that when I speak of literal interpretation, I require no man to deny the use of *figurative* language. I fully admit that emblems, figures, and symbols are used in foretelling Messiah’s glory, as well as in foretelling Messiah’s sufferings. I do not believe that Jesus was a literal “root out of dry ground,” or a literal “lamb.” (Isaiah. liii.) All I

maintain is, that prophecies about Christ's coming and kingdom do foretell literal facts, as truly as the prophecy about Christ being numbered with the transgressors. All I say is, that prophecies about the Jews being gathered, will be as really and literally made good as those about the Jews being scattered.

It is no good argument to tell us that the principle of literal interpretation deprives the Church of the use and benefit of many parts of the Old Testament. I deny the justice of the charge altogether. I consider that all things written in the Prophets concerning the salvation of individual souls, may be used by Gentiles as freely as by Jews. The hearts of Jews and Gentiles are naturally just the same. The way to heaven is but one. Both Jews and Gentiles need justification, regeneration, sanctification. Whatever is written concerning such subjects, is just as much the property of the Gentile as the Jew. Moreover, I hold Israel to be a people specially typical of the whole body of believers in Christ. I consider that believers now may take the comfort of every promise of pardon, comfort, and grace which is addressed to Israel. Such words I regard as the common portion of all believers. All I maintain is, that whenever God says He shall do or give certain things to Israel and Jerusalem in *this world*, we ought entirely to believe that to literal Israel and Jerusalem those things will be given and done.

It is no valid argument to say that many who think as I do about prophecy, have said and written very foolish things, and have often contradicted one another. All this may be very true, and yet the *principles* for which we contend may be scriptural, sound and correct. The infidel does not overturn the truth of Christianity when he points to the existence of Antinomians, Jumpers, and Shakers. The worldly man does not overturn the truth of real evangelical religion when he sneers at the differences of Calvinists and Arminians. Just in the same way one writer on prophecy may interpret Revelation or Daniel in one way, and another in another. One man may take on him to fix dates, and prove at last to be quite wrong; another may apply prophecies to living individuals, and prove utterly mistaken. But all these things do not affect the main question. They do not in the least prove that the advent of Christ *before* the millennium is not a Scriptural truth, and that the principle of interpreting Old Testament prophecy literally is not a sound principle.

Reader, I say once more, we ought to regard the mistakes of our Lord's disciples with great tenderness and consideration. We Christians are the last who ought to condemn them strongly. Great as their mistakes were, our own have been almost as bad. We have been very quick in discovering the beam in our Jewish brother's eyes, and have forgotten a large mote in our own. We have been long putting a great stumbling-block in his way, by our arbitrary and inconsistent explanations of Old Testament prophecy.

Reader, let us do our part to remove that great stumbling-block. If we would help to remove the veil which prevents the Jews seeing the *cross*, let us also strip off the veil from our own eyes, and look steadily and unflinchingly at *the second advent and the crown*.\*

II. The second question I wish to consider is this, *what is the present position of our Lord Jesus Christ?*

The parable appears to me to answer that question distinctly in the twelfth verse. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return." This nobleman represents the Lord Jesus Christ, and that in two respects.

Like the nobleman, the Lord Jesus is gone into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom. *He has not received it yet in possession*, though He has it in promise. He has a spiritual kingdom unquestionably: He is king over the hearts of His believing people, and they are all His faithful subjects. He has a controlling power over the world, without controversy: He is King of kings and Lord of lords. "By Him all things consist," and nothing can happen without His permission. But His real, literal, visible, complete kingdom the Lord Jesus has not yet received. To use the words of Heb. ii. 8, "We see not yet all things put under Him." To use the words of Psalm cx. 1, "He sits on the right hand of the Father till His enemies are made His footstool."

*The devil is the prince of this world* during the present dispensation. (John xiv. 30.) The vast majority of the inhabitants of the earth choose the things that please the devil far more than the things that please God. Little as they may think it, they are doing the devil's will, behaving as the devil's subjects, and serving the devil far more than Christ. This is the actual condition of Christendom as well as of heathen countries. After 1900 years of Bibles and Gospel preaching, there is not a nation, or a country, or a parish, or a long established congregation, where the devil has not more subjects than Christ. So fearfully true is it that the world is not yet the kingdom of Christ.

The Lord Jesus during the present dispensation is like David between the time of His anointing and Saul's death. He has the promise of the kingdom, but He has not yet received the crown and throne. (1 Sam. xxii. 1, 2.)

He is followed by a few, and those often neither great nor wise, but they are a faithful people. He is persecuted by His enemies, and oftentimes driven into the wilderness, and yet His party is never quite destroyed. But He has none of the visible signs of the kingdom at present: no earthly glory, majesty, greatness, obedience. The vast majority of mankind see no beauty in Him: they will not have this man to reign over them. His people are not honoured for their Master's sake: they walk the earth like princes in disguise. His kingdom is not yet come: His will is not yet done on earth excepting by a little flock. It is not the day of "*His power*." The Lord Jesus is biding His time.

Reader, I entreat you to grasp firmly this truth, for truth I believe it to be. Great delusion abounds on the subject of Christ's kingdom. Take heed lest any man deceive you by purely traditional teachings about prophetic truth. *Hymns* are composed and sung which darken God's counsel on this subject by words without knowledge. *Texts* are wrested from their true meaning, and accommodated to the present order of things, which are not justly applicable to any but the period of the second advent. Beware of the mischievous infection of this habit of text-wresting. Beware of the sapping effect of beautiful poetry, in which unfulfilled promises of glory are twisted and adapted to the present dispensation. Settle it down in your mind that Christ's kingdom is yet to come. His arrows are *not* yet sharp in the

hearts of His enemies. The day of His power has *not* yet begun. He is gathering out a people to carry the cross and walk in His steps; but the time of His coronation has not yet arrived.

But just as the Lord Jesus, like the nobleman, “went to receive a kingdom,” so, like the nobleman, the Lord Jesus intends one day “to return.”

The words of the Angels (Acts i. 11) shall have a complete fulfilment: “This same Jesus which was taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” As His going away was a real literal going away, so His return shall be a real literal return. As He came personally the first time with a body, so He shall come personally the second time with a body. As He came visibly to this earth and visibly went away, so when He comes the second time He shall visibly return. And then, and not till then, the complete kingdom of Christ shall begin. He left His servants as “a nobleman,” He returns to His servants as “a King.”

*Then* He intends to cast out that old usurper the devil, to bind him for a thousand years, and strip him of his power. (Rev. xx. 1.)

*Then* He intends to make a restitution of the face of creation. (Acts iii. 21.) It shall be the world’s jubilee day. Our earth shall at last bring forth her increase: the King shall at length have His own again. At last the ninety-seventh Psalm shall be fulfilled, and men shall say, “The Lord reigneth: let the earth rejoice!”

*Then* He intends to fulfil the prophecies of Enoch, John the Baptist, and St. Paul: “to execute judgment upon all the ungodly” inhabitants of Christendom— “to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire,”—and “in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the Gospel.” (Jude 15; Matt. iii 12; 2 Thess. i. 8.)

*Then* He intends to raise His dead saints and gather His living ones, to gather together the scattered tribes of Israel, and to set up an empire on earth in which every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord.

When, how, where, in what manner, all these things shall be, we cannot say particularly: enough for us to know that *they shall be*. The Lord Jesus has undertaken to do them, and they shall be performed: the Lord Jesus waits for the time appointed by the Father, and then they shall all come to pass. As surely as He was born of a pure virgin, and lived on earth thirty three years as a servant, so surely He shall come with clouds in glory, and reign on the earth as a king.

Reader, I charge you to establish in your mind among the great verities of your religion, that Christ is one day to have a complete kingdom in this world,—that His kingdom is not yet set up,—but that it will be set up in the day of His return. Know clearly whose kingdom it is now: not Christ’s, but the usurper Satan’s. Know clearly whose kingdom it is to be one day: not Satan the usurper’s, but Jesus Christ’s. Know clearly when the kingdom is to change hands, and the usurper to be cast out: when the Lord Jesus returns in person, and not before. Know clearly what the Lord Jesus is doing now: He is sitting at the right hand of the Father,—interceding as a high priest in the holy of holies for His people,—adding to their number such as shall be saved by the preaching of the Gospel,—and waiting till the



appointed “day of His power,” when He shall come forth to bless His people, and sit as a priest upon His throne. Know these things clearly, and you will do well.

Know these things clearly, and then *you will not cherish extravagant expectations* from any Church, minister, or religious machinery in this present dispensation: you will not marvel to see ministers and missionaries not converting all to whom they preach; you will not wonder to find that while some believe the Gospel, many believe not; you will not be depressed and cast down when you see the children of the world in every place many, and the children of God few. You will remember that “the days are evil,” and that the time of general conversion is not yet arrived. You will thank God that any are converted at all, and that while the Gospel is hid to the wise and prudent, it is yet revealed to babes. Alas, for the man who expects a millennium before the Lord Jesus returns! How can this possibly be, if the world in the day of His coming is to be found as it was in the days of Noah and Lot? (Luke xviii. 26-30.)

Know these things clearly, and then *you will not be confounded and surprised by the continuance of immense evils in the world*. Wars, and tumults, and oppression, and dishonesty, and selfishness, and covetousness, and superstition, and bad government, and abounding heresies, will not appear to you unaccountable. You will not sink down into a morbid, misanthropic condition of mind when you see laws, and reforms, and education, not making mankind perfect; you will not relapse into a state of apathy and disgust when you see Churches full of imperfections, and theologians making mistakes. You will say to yourself, “The time of Christ’s power has not yet arrived. The devil is still working among his children, and sowing darkness and division broadcast among the saints: the true King is yet to come.”

Know these things clearly, and then *you will see why God delays the final glory*, and allows things to go on as they do in this world. It is not that He is not able to prevent evil,—it is not that He is slack in the fulfilling of His promises,—but the Lord is taking out for Himself a people by the preaching of the Gospel. (Acts xvi. 14; 2 Peter iii. 9.) He is longsuffering to unconverted Christians. The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Once let the number of the elect be gathered out of the world,—once let the last elect sinner be brought to repentance, and then the kingdom of Christ shall be set up, and the throne of grace exchanged for the throne of glory.

Know these things clearly, and then you will *work diligently to do good to souls*. The time is short. “The night is far spent: the day is at hand.” The signs of the times call loudly for watchfulness, and speak with no uncertain voice. The Turkish empire is drying up; the Jews are cared for as they never have been for nineteen hundred years; the Gospel is being preached as a witness in almost every corner of the world. Surely if we would pluck a few more brands from the burning before it is too late, we must work hard and lose no time. We must preach,—we must warn,—we must exhort,—we must give money to religious societies,—we must spend and be spent far more than we have ever done yet.

Know these things clearly, and then *you will be often looking for the coming of the day of God*. You will regard the second advent as a glorious and comfortable truth, around which your best hopes will all be clustered. You will not merely think

of Christ crucified, but you will think also of Christ coming again. You will long for the days of refreshing and the manifestation of the sons of God. (Acts iii. 19; Rom. viii. 19.) You will find peace in looking back to the cross, and you will find joyful hope in looking forward to the kingdom.

Once more, I repeat, know clearly Christ's present position. He is like one who is "gone into a far country to receive a kingdom, and then to return."

III. The third and last question I wish to consider, is this: *What is the present duty of all Christ's professing disciples?*

When I speak of present duty, I mean, of course, their duty between the period of Christ's first and second advent. And I find an answer in the words of the nobleman, in the parable, to his servants: he "delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come."

Reader, I know few words more searching and impressive than these four: "Occupy till I come." They are spoken to all who profess and call themselves Christians. They address the conscience of every one who has not renounced his baptism, and formally turned his back on Christianity. They ought to stir up all hearers of the Gospel to examine themselves whether they are in the faith, and to prove themselves. Listen to me for a few minutes, while I try to impress them on your attention. For your sake, remember, these words were written: "Occupy till I come."

The Lord Jesus bids you "*occupy*." By that He means that you are to be "a doer" in your Christianity, and not merely a hearer and professor. He wants His servants not only to receive His wages, and eat His bread, and dwell in His house, and belong to His family,—but also to do His work. You are to "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works." (Matt. v.16.) Have you faith? It must not be a dead faith: it must "work by love." (Gal. v. 6.) Are you elect? You are elect unto "obedience." (1 Pet. i. 2.) Are you redeemed? You are redeemed that you may be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Tit. ii. 14.) Do you love Christ? Prove the reality of your love by keeping Christ's commandments. (John xiv. 15.) Oh, reader, do not forget this charge to "occupy!" Beware of an idle, talking, gossiping, sentimental, do-nothing religion. Think not because your doings cannot justify you, or put away one single sin, that therefore it matters not whether you do anything at all. Away with such a delusion! Cast it behind you as an invention of the devil. Think of the house built upon the sand, and its miserable end. (Matt. vii. 24-27.) As ever you would "make your calling and election sure," be a doing Christian.

But the Lord Jesus also bids you "*occupy your pound*." By this He means that He has given each one of His people some opportunity of glorifying Him. He would have you understand that everyone has got his own sphere,—the poorest as well as the richest; that everyone has an open door before him, and may, if he will, show forth his Master's praise. Your bodily health and strength, your mental gifts and capacities, your money and your earthly possessions, your rank and position in life, your example and influence with others, your liberty to read the Bible and hear the Gospel, your plentiful supply of means of grace,—all these are your "pounds." All these are to be used and employed with a continual reference to the glory of Christ: all these are His gifts. "Of Him come riches and honour." (1 Chron. xxix.

12.) “His is the silver, and His the gold.” (Hagg. ii. 8.) “His is your body, and His is your spirit.” (1 Cor. vi. 20.) “He appoints your habitation: He gives you life and breath.” (Acts xvii. 25, 26.) You are not your own: you are bought with a price. (1 Cor. vi. 20.) Surely it is no great matter if He bids you honour Him and serve Him with all that you have. Breathes there the man or woman among the readers of this tract that has received nothing at the Lord’s hand! Not one, I am sure. Oh, see to it, that you pay out your Lord’s money well and honestly! Take heed that you do not bury your pound!

But the Lord Jesus bids you also to “*occupy till He comes.*” By that He means that you are to do His work on earth, like one who *continually* looks for His return. You are to be like the faithful servant, who knows not what hour his master may come home, but keeps all things in readiness, and is always prepared. You are to be like one who knows that Christ’s coming is the great reckoning day, and to be ready to render up your account at any moment. You are not to suppose that you have any freehold in this world, nor even a lease: the greatest and the richest of mankind is only God’s tenant-at-will. You are not to neglect any social duty or relation of life because of the uncertainty of the Lord’s return. You are to fill the station to which God has called you in a godly and Christian way; and you are to be ready to go from the place of business to meet Christ in the air, if the Lord shall think fit. You are to be like a man who never knows what a day might bring forth and, therefore, to put off nothing till a “convenient season.” You are to rise and go forth in the morning, ready, if need be, to meet Christ at noon. You are to lie down in bed at night, ready, if need be, to be awakened by the midnight cry, “Behold the Bridegroom cometh!” You are to keep your spiritual accounts in a state of constant preparation, like one who never knows how soon they may be called for. You are to measure all your ways by the measure of Christ’s appearing, and to do nothing in which you would not like Jesus to find you engaged. This is to “occupy” till Jesus comes.

Think, reader, how *condemning* are these words to thousands of professing Christians! What an utter absence of preparation appears in their daily walk and conversation! How thoroughly unfit they are to meet Christ! They know nothing of occupying the gifts of God as loans for which they must give account. They show not the slightest desire to glorify Him with “body and spirit which are His.” They give no sign of readiness for the second advent. Well says old Gurnal, “It may be written on the grave of every unconverted man, Here lies one who never did for God an hour’s work.” Who can wonder in a world like this, if a minister often cries to his congregation, “Ye must be born again:” “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (John iii. 7; Matt. xviii. 3.)

Think again, how *arousing* these words ought to be to all who are rich in this world, but do not know how to spend their money rightly. Alas, there are many who live on as if Christ had never said anything about the difficulty of rich men being saved! They are rich towards their own pleasures, or their own tastes, or their own families, but not rich towards God! They live as if they would not have to give an account of their use of money; they live as if there was no reckoning day before the bar of Christ: they live as if Christ had never said, “It is more blessed to give

than to receive.” (Acts xx. 35.) “Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in heaven that faileth not.” (Luke xii. 33.) Oh, if this tract should by chance fall into the hands of such a one, I do beseech you consider your ways and be wise. Cease to be content with giving God’s cause a few shillings, or an occasional guinea; give far more liberally than you have done yet: give hundreds where you now give tens; give thousands where you now give hundreds. Then, and not till then, I shall believe you are “occupying,” as one who looks for Christ’s return. Alas, for the covetousness and narrow-mindedness of the Church of these days! May the Lord open the eyes of rich Christians.

Think again, how *instructive* are these words to all who are troubled by doubts about mingling with the world, and taking part in its vain amusements. It is useless to tell us that races, and balls, and theatres, and operas, and cards, are not *forbidden* by name in Scripture. The question we should ask ourselves is simply this,—”Am I occupying, as one who looks for Christ’s return, when I take part in these things? Should I like Jesus to return suddenly and find me on the race-course, or in the ball-room, or at the theatre, or at the card-table? Should I think I was in my right place, and where my Lord would have me to be?” Oh, dear reader, this is the true test by which to try all our daily occupations and employment of time! That *thing* which we would not do if we thought Jesus was coming tonight, that thing we ought not to do at all. That *place* to which we would not go if we thought Jesus was coming this day, that place we ought to avoid. That *company* in which we would not like Jesus to find us, in that company we ought never to sit down. Oh, that men would live as in the sight of Christ! not as in the sight of man, or of the Church, or of ministers,—but as in the sight of Christ! This would be “occupying till He comes.”

But think how *encouraging* are these words to all who seek first the kingdom of God; and love the Lord Christ in sincerity. What though the children of the world regard them as “righteous overmuch!” What though mistaken friends and relations tell them they pay too much attention to religion, and go too far! Those words, “Occupy till I come,” are words which justify their conduct. They may well reply to their persecutors, “I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down: I am striving to live so as to be ready when the Lord comes, ‘I must be about my Father’s business.’“

Let me conclude this tract by a few words of general application.

(1) First, let me draw from the whole subject a word of *solemn warning* for every one into whose hands this tract may fall. That warning is,—that there is a great change yet to come on this world, and a change we ought to keep constantly before our mind’s eye.

That change is a change of MASTERS. That old rebel, the devil, and all his adherents, shall be cast down. The Lord Jesus, and all His saints, shall be exalted and raised to honour. “The kingdoms of this world” shall “become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.” (Rev. xi. 15.)

That change is a change of *manners*. Sin shall no longer be made light of and palliated. Wickedness shall no longer go unpunished and unreprieved. Holiness shall become the general character of the inhabitants of the earth: “The new heaven and new earth” shall be the dwelling of “righteousness.” (2 Pet. iii 13,)

That change is a change of *opinion*. There shall be no more Socinianism, or Deism, or Scepticism, or Infidelity. All nations shall do honour to the crucified Lamb of God: all men shall know Him, from the least to the greatest. "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of Him, as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. xi. 9.)

I say nothing as to the time when these things shall take place. I object, on principle, to all dogmatism about dates. All I insist upon is this,—that there is a great change before us all,—a change for the earth, a change for man, and above all, a change for the saints.

I accept the prediction that "*there is a great improvement and development of human nature yet to take place.*" I accept it with all my heart. But how and when shall it be brought about? Not by any system of education! Not by any legislation of politicians! Not by anything short of the appearing of the kingdom of Christ. Then, and then only, shall there be universal justice, universal knowledge, and universal peace.

I accept the common phrase of many, "*There is a good time coming.*" I accept it with all my heart. I do verily believe there shall one day be no more poverty, —no more oppression, —no more ignorance, —no more grinding competition, —no more covetousness. But when shall that good time come? Never,—never till the return of Jesus Christ at His second advent! And for whom shall that time be good? For none but those who know and love the Lord.

I accept the common phrase, "*There is a man coming who will set all right that is now wrong. We wait for the coming man.*" I accept it with all my heart. I do look for one who shall unravel the tangled skein of this world's affairs, and put everything in its right place. But who is the great physician for an old, diseased, worn-out world? It is the man Christ Jesus who is yet to return.

Oh, reader, let us realize this point! There is before us all a great change. Surely, when a man has notice to quit his present dwelling-place, he ought to make sure that he has before him another home.

(2) Next, let me draw from the whole subject a *solemn question* for all into whose hands this tract may fall. That question is simply this: ARE YOU READY FOR THE GREAT CHANGE? Are you ready for the coming and kingdom of Christ?

Remember, I do not ask what you think about controversial points in the subject of prophecy. I do not ask your opinion about preterism and futurism; I do not ask whether you think revelation fulfilled or unfulfilled,—or whether you consider the Man of Sin to be an individual,—or whether you hold prophetic days to be years. About all these points you and I may err, and yet be saved. The one point to which I want to fix you down is this, "Are you ready for the kingdom of Christ?"

It is useless to tell me, that, in asking this, I put before you too high a standard. It is vain to tell me that a man may be a very good man, and yet not be ready for the kingdom of Christ. I deny it altogether. I say that every justified and converted man is ready, and that if you are not ready, you are not a justified man. I say that the standard I put before you is nothing more than the New Testament standard, and that the Apostles would have doubted the truth of your religion if you were not looking and longing for the coming of the Lord. I say, above all, that the grand end

of the Gospel is to prepare men to meet God. What has your Christianity done for you if it has not made you meet for the kingdom of Christ. Nothing: nothing! Nothing at all! Oh, that you may think on this matter, and never rest till you are ready to meet Christ!

(3) In the next place let me offer *an invitation* to all readers who do not feel ready for Christ's return. That invitation shall be short and simple. I beseech you to know your danger, and come to Christ without delay, that you may be pardoned, justified, and made ready for things to come. I entreat you this day to "flee from the wrath to come," to the hope set before you in the Gospel. I pray you in Christ's stead, to lay down enmity and unbelief, and at once "to be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. v. 20.)

I tremble when I think of the privileges which surround you in this country, and of the peril in which you stand so long as you neglect them. I tremble when I think of the possibility of Christ coming again, and of your being found unpardoned and unconverted in the day of His return. Better a thousand times will be his lot who was born a heathen, and never heard the Gospel, than the lot of him who has been a member of a Church, but not a living member of Christ. Surely the time past may suffice you to have delayed and lingered about your soul. Awake this day! "Awake thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give thee light." (Eph. v. 14.)

Lay aside everything that stands between you and Christ. Cast away everything that draws you back, and prevents you feeling ready for the Lord's appearing. Find out the besetting sin that weighs you down, and tear it from your heart, however dear it may be. Cry mightily to the Lord Jesus to reveal Himself to your soul. Rest not till you have got a real, firm, and reasonable hope, and know that your feet are on the Rock of Ages: rest not till you can say, "The Lord may come; the earth may be shaken; the foundations of the round world may be overturned; but thank God I have got treasure in heaven, and an advocate with the Father, and I will not be afraid."

Do this, and you shall have got something from reading a simple tract.

(4) Last of all, let me draw from the subject *an exhortation* to all who know Christ indeed, and love His appearing. That exhortation is simply this,—that you will strive more and more to be a "doing" Christian. (James i. 22.) Labour more and more to show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into marvellous light; improve every talent which the Lord Jesus has committed to your charge to the setting forth of His glory; let your walk declare plainly that you seek a country; let your conformity to the mind of Christ be unquestionable and unmistakable. Let your holiness be a clear plain fact, which even the worst enemies of the Gospel cannot deny.

Above all, if you are a student of prophecy, I entreat you never to let it be said that prophetic study prevents practical diligence. If you do believe that the day is really approaching, then labour actively to provoke others unto love and good works; if you do believe that the night is far spent, be doubly diligent to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Never was there a greater mistake than to fancy the doctrine of the personal return of Christ is calculated to para-

lyse Christian diligence. Surely there can be no greater spur to the servant's activity than the expectation of his master's speedy return.

This is the way to attain a *healthy* state of soul. There is nothing like the exercise of our graces for promoting our spiritual vigour. Alas, there are not a few of God's saints who complain that they want spiritual comfort in their religion, while the fault is altogether in themselves. "Occupy," "Occupy," I would say to such persons. Lay yourselves out more heartily for the glory of God, and these uncomfortable feelings will soon vanish away.

This is the way to *do good* to the children of the world. Nothing, under God, has such an effect on unconverted people as the sight of a real, thorough-going live Christian. There are thousands who will not come to hear the Gospel, and do not know the meaning of justification by faith, who yet can understand an uncompromising, holy, consistent walk with God. "Occupy," "Occupy," I say again, if you want to do good.

This is the way to promote *meetness* for the inheritance of the saints in light. There will be no idleness in the kingdom of Christ: the saints and angels shall there wait on their Lord with unwearied activity, and serve Him day and night. It is a fine saying of Bernard, that Jacob in his vision saw some angels ascending, and some descending, but none standing still. "Occupy," "Occupy," I say again, if you would be thoroughly trained for your glorious home.

Oh, brethren believers, it would be well indeed if we did but see clearly how much it is for our interest and happiness to occupy every farthing of our Lord's money,—to live very near to God!

So living we shall find great joy in our work—great comfort in our trials—great doors of usefulness in the world—great consolation in our sicknesses—great hope in our death—leave great evidences behind us when we are buried—have great confidence in the day of Christ's return—and receive a great crown in the day of reward.

I remain,  
Your affectionate Friend,

J. C. RYLE