

"REMEMBERING YOUR TRUE WORTH"

afternoon in London.

INTRODUCTION

It was a cold, rainy day. An awkward, rather unkempt man seemingly from nowhere, clothed in tattered, bedraggled garments with a violin under his arm entered a small music shop in London, and this gaunt-looking man muttered, "I'm starving, I'm starving...". He presented himself to a Mr. Betz, the shopkeeper. He then opened a package, placed it on the counter. It had a violin in it. Desperately, he pleaded, "Will you buy this so I can get something to eat".

Mr. Betz had already purchased several old violins that he hadn't been able to sell. Yet, out of the goodness of his heart and without so much as looking at the instrument, he handed the man a gold coin worth about five dollars and laid the violin on a shelf while the grateful man shuffled out into the cold streets of London.

Betz was a musician, and after his customers were gone he picked up the old violin. And when he drew the bow across the strings, he was surprised and taken back by the wonderful tone. He almost broke down with emotion at the sweet melody that was expressed - like something coming from another world. It was growing dark, and to quiet his emotions, he lit a candle. He looked inside the instrument, and there he saw cut into the wood, as was the master's custom, Antonio Stradivari, 1704!

Betz knew at once that this was the missing Stradivarius that had been lost for nearly 100 years. He ran out and began looking everywhere for the stranger who was too poor to buy a loaf of bread, but who had been holding in his possession a fantastic fortune. But the man was gone. He had disappeared into the rain and fog of London. No trace of this man was ever found.

So Betz had this fabulous violin. He eventually disposed of the instrument. Actually today it is in the Library of Congress. One owner of the instrument, now known as the Betz model, is said to have refused over one hundred thousand dollars for it. It's an interesting story.

DEVELOPMENT

Yet, how much like this man who sold this priceless possession for five dollars are many of us today? ~~Think about it.~~ We think we are poor, unworthy, useless; yet - most of us have unused possessions that have dynamic power, spiritual possibilities that are all locked up in our lives, which if released and cultivated could make us into whatever we wished to be. ~~If played like that violin could produce tones that will enrich our lives and the lives of others as we make our way through life.~~

We need to be reminded that no one is ever too old, too obscure, or too poor to inspire and enrich others lives with his or her God-given talents and possessions. "You are the salt of the earth...the light of the world", said Jesus.

For example, a poet was once trudging along a dusty road in New Hampshire. He reached the foot of a long hill. Tired, hot and hungry, he noticed a path leading into a shady grove with a placard that read, "Come In". It seemed so friendly; so following the path, he found a bubbling spring of cool water and beside it a table laden with fresh fruit and a sign saying, "Help yourself". He was so intrigued by this unusual thing that after eating and resting he walked back the hill to a house where he found an elderly man and his wife who told him the following story.

"We live alone and seeing so many passing travelers coming by, we decided to help them in some little way. As you may guess, we really don't have much money, but we do have this little farm and while it is somewhat poor, it does produce fine fruit and vegetables. So each day, we put fruit and vegetables on the table down by the spring for anyone who happens to pass this way".

It was this story that inspired Sam Walter Foss to write that immortal poem with these famous words,

"Let me live in my house by the side of the road,
and be a friend of man...."

This is the poem that has inspired scores of people to be more helpful - more humane, more friendly to their fellow creatures. The fruit given by a couple who had no money is actually the cup of cold water that Jesus was talking about, and it found in the poet, Sam Walter Foss, an inner need and an outward fulfillment which was then dispensed to a thirsty, weary world through his poem.

PERSONAL INFLUENCE

Whether he wants to or not, nobody ever really lives by himself alone, and the influence of the most obscure person among is immeasurable - just as a stone which is dropped into the sea will start a series of ripples that will eventually touch ever shore. We need to remember this, especially when we get down on ourselves and perhaps feel that our lives are insignificant, of little worth to ourselves or to the world in general. Never believe it.

Remember that line from Tennyson,

"Our echo rolls from soul to soul,
And grows forever and forever".

The point is this that just like that poor soul with the violin under his arm, we, too, hold a fantastic fortune in our hands. You and I are so divinely loaded with possessions that we never need to be poor in this world - neither materially nor spiritually - if we could know who we are and what we are!

The unchanging law of possessions spells out in plain practice that we keep by giving and we lose by keeping. As the school motto puts it: "What we I like
keep we lose and only what we give remains our own". The Sea of Galilee, for instance, is always fresh because it gives out all its gets. Fish lives in its pure, clean waters. The Dead Sea, on the other hand, is dead because it is taking in at one end and never giving out at the other. In like manner, you and I may have an inlet that is honest and pure, but unless we have an outlet for that which is ours, our life becomes dead, stagnant, unhappy and poverty ridden.

This is the key to the experience of many. When Jesus said to the young man, "Go and sell what you have, give to the poor", He was not thinking so much of the state of the poor as He was thinking about the soul of that young man - imprisoned, hedged in by all things more than the poor might ever need. For it is true that many persons are poor with all kind of earthly possessions around them, and others are exceedingly rich with nothing more than an active mind,

Now a sermon should "hit us where we live"....therefore, I'm asking you today to take a check on yourself..

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good thoughts, and a loving, sharing heart. The touch of these spirits upon our spirits, and the actions of their souls upon our souls certainly makes the world richer for their presence among us.

CHECK YOURSELF This morning, take a few moments while you're sitting here to run a check on yourself in this regard. Are you not the happiest, for instance, when you're giving out something of yourself to others - something which you think might bring them some help or happiness?

How blessed and happy must be that person who because of some word, some act, some thought, some gesture, some compliment causes others who are bogged down in despair and misfortune to rise up and to walk confidently on clouds, to be bathed, if you will, in Eternal Sunshine!

For example, one evening when the poet, Robbie Burns, along with other notables was visiting in the home of the Scot family in Edinburgh, the young boy, Walter Scot, who was about ten at the time, showed Burns some of his poems written in a very childish hand. Detecting a spark of genius in the lad, the famous poet, Burns, laid his hands on the head of young Walter Scot and said, "My dear boy, you will someday be a greater man than either your father or your grandfather" (Both of whom were prominent in the affairs of Scotland). Later on, Walter Scot had indeed become famous, and often looking back he would say that the secret of his success was found in what Burns had said and done.

"I owe everything to the poet, Robbie Burns, for it was in the moment that he put his hands upon my head, blessed me that I felt my ordination into literature".

Remember this---by lifting others, you yourself are lifted and given wings! This is the surest way of winning wings for your own spirit. Try it. Try giving more of yourself to others. When you win wings for someone else, you are also winning wings for yourself. You hold in your hands a fantastic fortune...

CONCLSSION All of us have possessions of mind, heart and soul...given to us by God. Bring those along with you as you go forth from here. The main secret of achieving health, happiness and prosperity was revealed in the five words spoken by our Lord, "Seek and ye shall find". Isn't it true that in life we so often do find what we are looking for. In other words, if we go through life lookigg only for rags and papers, then that is about what we'll find.

I know a man - good and well-to-do - who is constantly depressed about what he thinks will happen to him in the years ahead. He lives in daily fear of illness, hospital bills, and that his money will run out. He is so obsessed by these that he will probably be upset if these things don't happen to him.

Another man I know is just the opposite. He is happy, radiant, confident because he is sure that the coming years will grow better as they go along, and he won't be discouraged or disappointed because this is exactly what they will be. Friends, you and I are rich today and will be forever if we only look forward to such a life and expect it. By carefully looking over your situation right now, you will probably find many unused opportunities and possessions that you never dreamed you had, but if we fail to recognize them and use them well, they are lost forever from the face of the earth. You hold in your hands a fantastic

fortune. Use it well, remembering what Jesus said: "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world".

PRAYER Make us aware, our Father, of the gifts and possessions that are
 ours, of the potential for giving and sharing with which we are
blessed. Never let us become discouraged with ourselves, for we know that we
have been fashioned for great things. Tell us what we need to hear. Show us
what we need to do to be good servants of Jesus Christ. Amen