

A Watchman at the Veranda

When I started working as a teacher, the national body commissioned to recruit and remunerate teachers was slow such that it would take them about three months to process and release the first salaries. During that time, life was difficult since I had no other source for subsistence. In fact, I had to plead with my landlord to allow me grace period of the three months without paying house rent. The agreement was that I would pay him in arrears when I got the money.

There was a caretaker *cum* watchman employed by the landlord to be responsible for the estate. This man happened to be a drunkard but was playing religion. He didn't seem to have any money or time to make food for himself. Any time I prepared my meagre meals, he would come to my house so that we might share the little food. He knew the times of my meals. He would come and sit at the veranda and when he was sure the food was ready, he would clear his voice loud enough to notify me that he was around. I would then go out, call him in and we would then eat together.

This went on for sometime until I got fed-up. I complained in my heart, "At least this man ought to be responsible for himself". I felt that it wasn't fair for him to just drink away his money and expect me to provide his meals. To make it worse, I was struggling, hardly having enough for my own subsistence and welfare. And how I had a problem with people who ridiculed Christianity—people who were playing religion when in essence they were being an embarrassment to the genuine faith!

One day, I decided that enough was enough. I wasn't going to invite him in anymore. I decided to disregard his repeated "announcements" about his presence. I started eating. Though I had made my meal in the best way I knew, the food tasted stale. I was struggling to swallow it. In the process, a soft voice spoke to me from within. It was so real I never doubted it. In fact, I gave attention to the voice and listened keenly as if it was a physical voice. I was asked, 'If it was Christ sitting out there, would you still go ahead and eat without inviting Him in?' My answer was a prompt 'NO!' I never at once picked the relationship between the man sitting out at the veranda and Jesus, so I ignored the question and the answer I had given and struggled to eat on.

The voice asked me once again, 'If it was Jesus sitting out at the veranda, would you for the reason that you have little food and are struggling to survive, fail to invite Him in?' My answer was prompt again. This time I explained that if it were Christ, I would even step aside and allow Him eat the whole food. I wouldn't care even if I went hungry but my Lord ate. The voice didn't talk again—I didn't get instructions what to do. Things went so fast. In what might have been a second or two, I meditated on the implications of the voice that twice challenged me to consider Christ. I had to call the man in and did it at once—with joy. In the process, I also vowed in my heart to call him in any time he came around, and as long as he would continue coming.

That did it! The man never came back again. It was like the Lord brought him and made him persist just enough to get me tired of doing good. After this experience, the Lord taught me something precious—doing good to people who don't deserve it and, to make it even heavier, at a time when one is not well endowed.

Something we have to win over is the inclination to justify ourselves. Sometimes we may get logical justification for our action yet it may not be what the Lord wants us to do. For instance, even after having been spoken to by the inner voice, I still could have chosen to reason out why I wasn't obligated to invite the man in as follows:

- Though I am a Christian, I shouldn't allow people to take advantage of me;
- The man couldn't *represent* Christ since the latter don't take advantage of others, neither is He a drunkard;
- At least I had tried enough;
- Continuing to provide his meals is encouraging him to be irresponsible.

I laid all these justifications aside and invited the man in. After this episode, the Lord gave me a new insight and the practicality of Matthew 25 especially the verses about those who did and those who didn't minister to Him (vs. 31-46). Like many other scriptures, the practicality of this portion of the Bible was completely hidden from me. There are many portions in the Bible that we have taken as favourite areas of preaching instead of areas of fervent practice.

Since the said passage is long for purposes of quoting, I would recommend that you read it. I will nevertheless recount some portions of the story so that you can get the picture.

Referring to Himself as the Son of Man, the Lord begins in verse 31 by saying that when He comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the moment of truth shall come when He announces the meaning of being on either the right or the left—being a sheep or a goat. For me, this is one of the most solemn moments in the Bible and to make it even more harrowing, this moment is surely in waiting in the eschatology. It is just a question of time.

The King will say to those on His right:

Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.
—v.34.

Why are these people blessed and given an inheritance? These are the people who, not by *word* but by *work*, ministered to the Lord:

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.
—verses 35-36.

I believe the Lord just set the ball rolling in the direction of those that He would identify with. If He was to continue, He would have included the other most ignored in the society—the orphans, the mentally retarded, the uneducated, the widows, the foreigners, the drug addicts, *etc.*

In the above account, the Lord deliberately ignores the people in the limelight. He doesn't say, for example, 'I was a King and you welcomed Me; I was a celebrity and you applauded Me; I was rich and you exalted Me'. The "sheep" will even be surprised that what they did to the least accounted to have been done to the Lord. They actually met and ministered to the King in the persons of the least and not in the high ranks of people that popular expectation takes to represent the King.

He is a unique King. He does not identify with and necessarily get represented by the pompous kingly-apparelled-lot that our world associate kingship with. But the good thing is that He doesn't ignore them either.

If I meet you on the road and you tell me you are looking for Jesus, I would show you where you are most likely to find *him*: Search among the poor; among children; among sinners—*he* is a doctor who goes around looking for sick people that need treatment. You will most likely meet *him* attending to a morally unstable woman at one time and at a madman at another. Sometimes you may not even find *him* in the crowd. You may instead search in the lonely places and find *him* agonising in prayer when

everyone else is succumbing to drowsiness. Sometimes *he* is so unnoticeable you may need someone to point *him* out for you, yet he is a King.

Are you looking for Jesus? You may find *him* in that stranger who has no place to lay his head and who doesn't have anything to show for the popular expectations; no personality profile for celebrity; no heritage, no nobility of birth, You may find *him* imprisoned in one of the jails in your town. You may even miss *him* after *he* fails to fit your expectations and description of a king. Are you looking for Christ? You need to be very careful, chances of missing *him* are far much higher than those of finding *him*.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-26) shows us how the rich man missed a chance to be blessed by not minding the poor man. One thing we must remember is that if God gives us food in a neighbourhood of famine, we can be rest assured that the hungry will come to our doors; if God gives us riches in an environment of poverty, we can be certain that we will have to contend with big numbers of the poor peeping at our gates; if God gives us land in a place of landlessness, we can be certain that squatters will come to share a piece of our land; if God gives us water in an environment of drought, thirst will naturally drive people to our springs; if God gives us a house and a home in a neighbourhood of houselessness and homelessness, we will wake up in the morning and find vagabonds lying at our veranda.

The big question is: What will we do with them? Will we threaten and warn them to steer clear of our territory and property? Will we push them away empty-handed? Will we give them something for the moment but ask them never to come back again? Will we just ignore them? Will we give a cosmetic smile to deceive them that we accept them? Will we offer crocodile tears to deceive them that we sympathise with their plight when in our heart we are really questioning why they are moving so close? (see Proverbs 21:13).

What will we do with them? Will we blame them for their plight? Will we serve them with the leftovers from our tables? Will we refuse to yield when they ask for the bread that belongs to our children?

What will we do with them? Will we look down upon them and have nothing to do with people that look like accursed?

*Whatever sacrificial giving one makes, it is lowered by how much one publicises it. Just as people are reluctant to allow others know the much they have in their accounts, so should they be averse in letting others know what they are giving to God, especially when it is **much**.*

It is God who purposed some to be born in rich countries while others in poor countries; some to be born in rich families and others in poor families. We must remember that it is the same God who also puts survival instincts on people. This means that foreigners (for example) from the poor or troubled countries, for purposes of survival, would always come to our peaceful countries. Most of them are likely to be of different races. What will we do with them? Will we blame them for the wars and poverty in their countries? Will we wonder why they are coming to compete for and deplete our God-given resources?

It must be remembered that national governments are in place to control the influx of people from other countries so that the poor nations, for example, do not empty their citizens into the rich countries. Nevertheless, for one reason or the other, we would always meet people whom the system has allowed to enter and stay. As Christians, what attitude would we have towards them and how will we relate with them, their status, races and gender, *etc.*, notwithstanding?

A Phone Call from the King

An evangelist told a story that was basically trying to re-enact Matthew 25:31-46. A woman's phone rang. She went to answer it.

'Who is calling?' She inquired.

'I am the Lord Jesus. I would wish to be your guest today around 3:00 p.m.', came the reply.

The woman, a Christian, was excited. She went straight into business, making arrangements for the Lord's visitation. She cleaned her house; arranged the chairs and spread a carpet. She prepared the best meal she knew how. She did an elaborate preparation and was happy at how fast things got into place. Just some few minutes before 3:00, a ragged boy, certainly a vagabond, was standing at the door. He asked for some food and water to drink. The lady thought to herself, "The Lord gonna not find this unkept, dirty hobo here". The lady asked the boy to get away as first as he got there. The boy pleaded but in vain. He went away—dejected.

After a few minutes, an old man looking much worse than the boy was at the door, asking to be allowed to cool his heels and also to get something to eat. The lady was sure that the King would be arriving any moment. There was no food and no place for the old man. He had to leave immediately. The lady told him that she was expecting a very important guest and wasn't about to embarrass herself and the guest with uninvited and unwelcome intruder. Like the boy, the old man also went away dejected after having being heartlessly rejected.

The Lord was surely getting late by then. When she heard another knock at the door, she thought, "Surely the King has finally arrived"! She went to answer the door excitedly. Standing at the door was an old lady looking sick. She was thirsty and hungry. She didn't insist to get something to eat but pleaded for water. Just like the other two earlier interlopers, she wasn't the kind that one would be comfortable with in a "Kingly environment". The woman now got even more impatient and was wondering why intruders were coming one after the other at a "wrong" time and day. They were not the kind she would be comfortable entertaining even if she wasn't expecting the King. She asked the old lady to leave.

Around 4, the woman couldn't understand what happened to the Lord on His way. But as she was wondering, the phone rang. She picked the phone and recognised the Lord's voice. "What happened my Lord?" She inquired. She thought He was going to apologise for not having made it in time. She was surprised when the Lord said:

I have come to your door three times and you wouldn't allow Me in. In all the three occasions, I left hungry, thirsty and tired. There is no place for Me in your house.

That was it! What a devastation! The woman lost all the three chances to minister to the Lord. This is not an exaggerated story. These things happen day-in, day-out. The most painful thing is that we lose these chances without even knowing it. This means, we keep on losing more chances. The practicality of the teachings of the Lord Jesus is

hidden to so many of us. This is quite unfortunate. The people that we are sure don't "represent" Christ are the very people that represent Him.

... the food was multiplied because of the need and the purpose of the multiplication would have been defeated if it wasn't distributed.

Sometimes the problem is not the mistake we make but the fact that we are not even aware we are making one. It is better to be sick and be aware of it than being sick and not knowing it. Anyone aware of sickness in his body would quickly seek medical attention, but for the one who doesn't know, the sickness would continue killing the body without restraint.

Some of the dreaded sicknesses hide in the body for a long time before they are discovered. Most of the times they are discovered when the damage has already been done. This is an example of the ignorance for which the Bible says, "... my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge ..." (Hos. 4:6; Is. 5:13).

How we should constantly get our spiritual health examined lest there be hiding some dangerous sicknesses taking toll of our spiritual health. The Bible says,

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.
Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?
—2 Corinthians 13:5.

People who are keen on their physical health would train, eat nutritious and healthy food and have periodical medical examination. They don't wait to be taken by surprise. It is a known fact that some people may look healthy yet they aren't. The same way, some people may look spiritually healthy yet they may not necessarily be *that* healthy. If we are going to be serious with our spiritual health, we must train (meditate and practice); eat a balanced nutritious food (balanced Word of God) and have ourselves examined by the Spirit of God (not periodically but daily). Sending hungry poor people away without food or any manner of ministration is a sure sign of spiritual degeneration. Jesus would definitely be grieved by this.

Anyone who pursues the heart of Christ, would welcome the rugged boy and open the door wide for the old man and give the old lady water in the very bowl preserved for the King. There wouldn't be a thought of hurrying them out but allowing the Lord to come and find them there, having walked on the very carpet that was spread for Him; sitting on the very chair that was prepared for Him and eating the very food that was preserved for Him. If it is the Lord I know, He wouldn't have a problem with that. Can we force ourselves to see Jesus in the persons of the lowly around us?

God's Uneven Distribution of Possibilities and Possessions

There is a wrong notion doing its rounds regarding the relationship between hard work and affluence. Many people hold that hard work is the sum prerequisite to wealth. Yes, hard work is important and biblical for success, but in the vacuum of what I call "Favour Factor", hard work is not all it takes to be successful (Hag. 1:6,9-11). A hard work without God's favour may not amount to anything. The Bible says that it is God

who gives the power to get wealth (Deut. 8:17-18). Hard work must be considered in the context of natural resources which only God provides.

A fable is told of a hyena that went out to look for food. He climbed mountains and went down the valleys. He crossed rivers and tore through bushes. For days, there was neither an animal to kill nor a carcass to eat. Then, when he was about to give up, he came across a goat that was tied to a tree. He became boastful and said, "This is the result of my hard work. I surely deserve this. I don't need to thank God for it because I have worked for it myself". Because of this proud attitude, God denied him wisdom of how to proceed. When he attempted to kill the goat, the struggling goat entangled him by the rope. To solve this problem, he decided to cut the rope first before killing the goat. That was a terrible mistake. Immediately he cut the rope, the goat started running and because the hyena was hungry and weak, he couldn't keep the pace. He watched his meal escape before his eyes. He remembered to call on God to help, but it was too late.

Some people may work harder than others yet remain poor while others may just lift a finger or two and their harvest would be enormous. But even if our hard work has made us rich, we still owe it all to God. There is no room for pride in either case. Whether we have worked extremely hard or just "lifted a finger", we must always be conscious that we are operating under favour factor. It is because of this favour factor that those who are rich are strictly warned against despising and misusing the poor. Listen to the Apostle Paul's instructions to Timothy:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

—1 Timothy 6:17-18.

We often ask ourselves why some people are so rich while others are so poor. The irony is that some of the poor people have even worked harder than the rich ones. Or why some countries are so rich and others so ravaged. Is it the mistake of people living in such places? Not quite!

An Atheist Lady?

I once had a talk with a lady who believed she was an atheist. One of the things she was picking on was the fact that if God exists, why is there a lot of problem in the world? She couldn't understand how a good God who supposedly loves everyone and every nation should give so much to one nation while in the other, kids die of starvation.

That she had a point wasn't in doubt. I admitted that I equally have questions and puzzles that I haven't got answers for. I explained to her that for us who have chosen to believe, it is not because we have had all our questions in life answered. And definitely, it doesn't mean that we don't have puzzles and pieces that don't fit together.

Nevertheless, most of the things that made her "mad" with God are results of: human choices, disobedience and stubbornness. Her major concerns were things like famine and wars. I pointed to her that life is meaningful because of the gift of free will and the ability to choose. God allows us to choose what we want to do with ourselves and with others. This is one of the virtuous discretion of the Divine wisdom. Life would be boring if we didn't have a choice at anything. I then posed a question to her: "Did you know that the so-called problems and pains in the world would reduce by 70% (this is a very conservative estimation) if the human-factored problems were eliminated?"

Most of the problems in the world result from human negligence and unwillingness to obey God. Let us look at it this way: If all the resources used in the weapon and

ammunition industries, not to mention the funding of wars, were diverted to irrigating the arid lands; distributing food, medicine and water to the unfortunate famine-stricken parts of the world; building and servicing medical facilities and managing the environment, no single person would starve on this planet. God had given enough resources to feed every soul on the earth. The only mystery is that He didn't distribute them evenly. I believe He put them in some hands that were in turn to distribute them just as He endowed some nations to do the same. What we see, however, are power-plays and balance of power; hatred and animosity; greed and selfishness; terrorism and wars, *etc.*

Another human factor that is a major source of problem is the disobedience to the teachings of Christ. According to His teachings, Christ expects us to love and pray for those who hate, persecute, look down upon us, *etc.*—including our very enemies (Rom. 12:14; Lk. 6:27-29). Christ's apostles emphatically resounded this teaching about love for everyone, enemies inclusive. If this were to be obeyed, it would eliminate terrorism, the spirit of revenge and counter-revenge. This would rid the world of wars and sufferings related to them. It would also eliminate personal feuds. It is extremely difficult to persist in a fight where the opponent is not "replying". It is as difficult as trying to do a tag of war with someone who is neither pulling nor holding his end of the rope. The spirit of war is kept alive by the continuous exchange of hostilities.

Another problem that has caused immense suffering is human greed. What makes this worse is that many people are greedy without knowing it.

If the human-factored miseries were eliminated, we could only remain with the problems caused by natural phenomena, the likes of earthquakes, storms, lightnings and floods. I strongly believe that disasters of natural causes would approximately account for only 30% or less of the catastrophes in the world.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

I mentioned the case of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar above (Lk. 16:19-26). Let me pick it up again and highlight some issues. From the story that the Lord Jesus gave, it is obvious that Lazarus was poor materially but rich spiritually. If the rich man was humble enough to share his material riches with Lazarus, he could have opened possibilities of the *materially poor* Lazarus to share his *spiritual wealth*. The rich man didn't consider for a moment that the poor Lazarus had anything to offer, leave alone something of eternal value. He ignored him and must have been fully convinced that Lazarus could only receive and had nothing to give.

He was dead wrong! Poverty makes the rich have a seared prejudice about the poor. The rich thinks that the poor can only be parasites, devoid of any symbiotic relationship. This pride of the rich is not only secular, it also has a spiritual dimension. I will let the reader find out where and how.

*There are many portions in the Bible that we have
taken as favourite areas of preaching instead of areas
of fervent practice.*

Christians who think that being poor is a sign of a curse and an indicator that one has no heritage with God should ask themselves why the Lord Jesus used this example

to show a person who was brandished to the thick of poverty is depicted to have inherited an abode with Him. In Luke 6:17-26, the Lord clearly pronounced blessings upon the poor while pronouncing woes unto the rich. This, however, doesn't mean that by virtue of being poor one is guaranteed a place with God despite his choices in this life, neither does it mean that all the rich are damned. General tendency, nevertheless, is that rich people don't have much attention and commitment to the things that please God. In fact many of them think that they don't need God.

It is my strong conviction that some poor people are not poor necessarily because they are lazy, neither are they so because they are cursed. Through their poverty, the unsearchable wisdom of God is displayed. Some people are also poor because those to whom God entrusted the responsibility of distribution failed to distribute the share that belonged to them (the poor). For example, there are many rich people out there who don't pay fair wages for a work done by (poor) employees (see Mal. 3:5; Jam. 5:1-4; Prov. 22:22-23).

Equally, it is also my strong conviction that some rich people are rich not because they worked harder than others around them, neither are they so because they are blessed. There is so much lying under the surface most of which have not been understood in relation to the cause-effect between blessings and riches, on the one hand, and curses and poverty on the other. This shouldn't be difficult to accept and it shouldn't surprise us either that there are as many biblical cases of strong positive correlation between blessings and poverty, just as there are blessings and riches on the one hand. On the other hand, there are also positive correlation between curses and riches just as there are curses and poverty. It is not a black and white case.

In Luke 6:20, for example, it is explicit that one can be blessed even though one is poor. When Jesus began His well-known sermon on the plain, He looked at His disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God". Elsewhere (Matt. 5:3), though there is the specification of, "poor in spirit", looking at Luke's record and also considering the social and economic status of Jesus' disciples, these people were actually poor—materially. The reason is that it is easy for the poor to follow Jesus than it is for the rich who always, in pursuit of the wealth of the world, have no time to follow Christ.

In the same Luke 6, He also said about the rich, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort" (v. 24). It may be inclusive, but there are strong reasons to conclude that Jesus wasn't talking more on the spiritually rich than He was actually referring to the materially rich. The same way, in the above case, we must not ignore the fact that He was referring to the materially poor just as He was also referring to the spiritually poor.

In Proverbs 15:6b, we read, "... the income of the wicked brings them trouble". Wealth without a strong relationship with God is the worst tragedy. It is a pity that those who ought to know this don't know it. It is a tragedy because the pursuit and accumulation of wealth don't fulfil people's life, yet it leads to "worshipping" materialism. The pursuit of God brings contentment that gives peace to the soul even if one does not manage to acquire much materially.

Consider the parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12:13-21) and the story of the rich ruler (Lk. 18:18-30). The wealth of these people became a curse to them. Wealth tends to have a common influence upon the rich. It becomes their idol and by extension, a curse to them. One big undoing of the rich is their unwillingness to share or distribute. The other major disadvantage of the wealth of the rich is that it may make them so comfortable that they usually think they don't need God. The former case, that is, unwillingness to share, doesn't only concern individuals, it climbs to every level. It is also true for organisations—poor versus rich organisations; poor churches against rich ones; poor nations against the rich nations, *etc.*

One thing we must remember is that if God gives us food in a neighbourhood of famine, we can be rest assured that the hungry will come to our doors; if God gives us riches in an environment of poverty, we can be certain that we will have to contend with big numbers of the poor peeping at our gates...

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, I pointed out that the rich man didn't think that there was anything he could gain from Lazarus. This attitude is not only on individuals, it runs through organisations as well. Many churches, regrettably, have this attitude. Rich churches have the attitude that they can only "give" to but not gain from the poor churches. Anointing doesn't care about the material disposition of churches. Many materially rich churches have failed to tap the anointing and spiritual wealth in the materially poor churches.

While those people who regarded the least are being rewarded, those who disregarded them will be sent away—to eternal damnation. The question is, did the Lord just threaten or did He mean that those who disregarded the plight of the unprivileged will be sent away? If we say that there are some of us Christians who are doing a great deal of disregarding the plight of the least, is it not true? Can we afford to take the warnings lightly—maybe counting on the grace?

“Hiding” Behind Prayer?

I once read a true story of a Christian family that was living well—they had all they needed and wanted. It was an intercessory family, “concerned” about their neighbours.

One evening after meals, as their custom was, they gathered for a family prayer. As the father of the home concluded that evening's prayer, he offered a very emotional plea especially for their neighbours whom they knew were struggling. They hardly had anything to eat. He prayed that the Lord might provide for their needs and bless them. The prayer was so passionately and emotionally offered that at the end, there were tears on the faces of some members of the family.

Something strange happened at the end of the prayer. One of the sons of the home, a 7-year-old, called his dad and announced that God had answered the prayer. As they were still not clear why the boy believed that the prayer had been answered and how, he asked his dad, “Daddy, may I please have your wallet!” The atmosphere forbade disobedience regardless of who gave the order. It was also like the boy spoke with an authority that left no room for disputing. The father handed over the wallet not sure what the boy intended to do with it. It was amazing that a young boy of his age had known that God uses people to minister to people. The boy pulled out all the money that was in the wallet at the time and ran out to take it to the neighbours. At the neighbours, he didn't say that the money was from his dad. He told them that God had sent them the money. With no further explanation, he ran back to their house.

Yes, we are called upon to pray and prayer we must offer, but there are occasions when we “hide” behind prayer when what they need to do is to act in love. The kind of love the Bible emphasises is an active one. It is a love demonstrable by the right action.

God so loved the world that He gave His Son for the redemption of the sin-sinking world (Jhn. 3:16).

In 1 John 3:16-18, the Bible says,

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Often times we miss the opportunity of showing practical love. We pray when we need to step out and do something.

The standard that was set by Christ of which John is also highlighting is that of laying down our life for our brothers. This is when our love would count for something of quality. Nevertheless, even in cases where we ought to show practical love that wouldn't even count for a laid-down-life, we don't even do anything. In other words, there are givings that we may do without a sacrifice yet we don't bother. This shows how much we are far from laying down our life for others.

James adds a strong voice to what I call "PC" (Practical Christianity). Part of his practical-packed exhortation is what he calls faith and deeds. He is asking:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed", but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?
—James 2:14-16.

Wishing people well verbally is common. I am not sure how many people I have wished well when I was supposed to act materially, but I know a number of occasions when brethren have wished me well when I needed something more than just a well-wish. When such a thing happens, I don't take offence but allow them to help me be sensitive to the needs around me that God wants me to attend to materially.

No Wastage!

There are usually portions of the Scripture that one may read and pass several times before "seeing" the insight. Some statements look like a drop in the biblical ocean of captivating glamour. I don't know how many times I read through John 6 and failed to pick much from verse 12. Anytime I was reading John 6, I would get buried in the storyline, paying more attention to the idea of miraculous multiplication and divine provision. Verse 12 "hides" a very important value.

John 6 from verse 1 onwards details that Jesus was followed by a great crowd of people whom at one point He perceived to be hungry. The crowd was so big (about five thousand men) that according to Philip, eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite. There was found a boy however with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far would they go among so many?

Jesus directed that people be seated on the grass. He then took the loaves, gave thanks, and the loaves were multiplied and were distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. The same was done with the fish. The climax of this story

would end with the fact that all people ate to their fill out of the five loaves and two small fish.

One day, I was however “distracted” by a very startling portion—an anticlimax. I didn’t seem to have noticed it before. Verse 12 and 13 says:

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “*Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted*”. So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten (*italics, author’s emphasis*).

Look at it again! The Divine Provider; The Multiplier; the One who has just shown the divine abundance and lavishness, directing that the fragments be gathered up! What for? These pieces were not only pieces, they were left-over. People had just had their fill, why bother to gather the pieces? If the Bible didn’t tell us, we would suggest that Jesus was probably an environmentalist and wanted the place cleaned up. He was definitely an environmentalist but the Lord gave the reason for which He wanted the fragments gathered up—“Let nothing be wasted”. Jesus surely gets very preoccupied with little things—things that people would ignore or throw away.

For Jesus to call attention to the fragments was not only symbolic of the fact that Divine estimation doesn’t ignore the little things, it was also a show of the divine consistency, namely, it was out of the little that He provided the abundance. The lesson is that we may not know God’s abundance if we disregard the little.

I mentioned earlier that people who eat and throw food might be throwing away food that ought to feed somebody somewhere. Throwing or wasting food is not Christian. I usually question people who serve themselves from a serving bowl, eat and then leave some on their plates to be wasted. It is not only rude and a discouragement to the person who took his/her time to prepare the food but also an insensitive wastefulness. I usually serve on my plate what I know I will clear. If I suspect that I might not like the food, I would put very little so that I can finish it. To make it even worse, sometimes we are given the privilege of self-service but we end up in “selfish-service”. This is a case where one loads his/her plate full and fails to finish the food yet those coming behind would get either little or no food left.

This article is an excerpt from the book: *VIRTUE THAT COUNTS: Pursuing That Which Touches The Heart Of God* ©2004. Copyright reserved.

NB: No rights reserved regarding readership. This article can be circulated on conditions that it bears the information that it is a copyrighted material.