

Occupy till I Come

Brethren and sisters let us go back in time for a moment to the first century and take a look at the disciples who had been with Jesus for 3½ years while he was preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. For the greatest part of that time, they too had been preaching that same Gospel. Moreover, they had seen him do miracles, fantastic signs, even raising the dead. There was no doubt in their minds he was the Messiah. Now in the fourth year of his ministry, they are on their way to Jerusalem because the time of the Passover is near. There was a climactic feeling, “surely, this is the time that he will usher in the Kingdom of God.” This is on their minds. Knowing their anticipation, Jesus spake a parable unto them, which we find in Luke 19:13, where he said,

“A certain nobleman went not 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.”

That word “occupy” (pragmateuomai) is used only once in the New Testament as a verb, here in this place. As a noun, we find the Apostle Paul using it in 2 Timothy 2:4, “*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs* (Greek pragmateia) *of this life that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*”

This Greek word has to do with business, the affairs of life. Now we think of the word occupy as occupancy—as filling something, to fill time or space. But it means more than that as we see from this parable. Because when the nobleman returned, he wanted an accounting of these three servants. Let us look at this reckoning with them. The first has gained ten pounds with his one; another gained five; and the last had carefully laid it away, protected it, he thought, and gave it to him with no return at all. He probably felt quite proud of himself. He had not lost it. He had not given it away. He had not sold it. He went to some effort; he laid it up carefully in a napkin. He had it. It was safe, and he proudly gave it to him. But there was nothing produced from it.

By this parable, Jesus, at this time when he knows he will soon be leaving his disciples, gives them one word of advice. And that word continues down through time to us—OCCUPY. He gives directions as to what we should do until he returns and how to gain eternal life. Most of the rest of the New Testament goes into the details of this occupying, the do’s and don’ts that we have to learn. The Apostle Paul leads the way with these instructions. He says “beware” — “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8). This is a warning from Paul. Now, we are familiar with warnings. A sign on the gate says: “Beware of the Dog.” We don’t open that gate and go in. Another sign has a warning — “High Voltage,” and we are cautious. A highway sign says, “Caution, Deer Crossing,” and again we are cautious. We believe these signs. We must believe Paul’s signs as well—these warning signs that we find in the New Testament.

Webster tells us of philosophy that it is really a love of wisdom and knowledge. There are other definitions that have come down to us since then; it is a particular system of principles for the conduct of life, a study of human morals, cares and behaviour. The mental balance acquired as a result of this study. That is Webster. Paul’s description, through the Spirit, is — “*vain deceit, traditions of men, rudiments of the world,*” all of which is in opposition to Christ. Paul says of such, “Beware,” Why? Because it is detrimental to life in the Truth. It will hinder us from “occupying.” It clutters up the mind. It puts things in the mind that have no need to be there. And the more we have in the mind of the things of the world, the harder it is to make a clear, concise decision. Solomon tells us, “*Commit thy works unto the Lord and thy thoughts shall be established*” (Proverbs 16:3). This is good advice. Fill our minds with the Word of God and there is no problem in making a decision when we need to make it. Paul agrees when he says—

“But I fear lest by any means as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtility, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

Now, to successfully contend with an enemy, we must know something about him. What are his strengths? What are his weaknesses? Of what is he capable? Where is he? What is likely to be his next move? And what is his overall strategy? This enemy, philosophy, that Paul speaks of is easy to be found, “*if*” (this is most important), if we are determined not to be in his camp. But the problem is, his camp is very large. It covers the whole world. Philosophy is subtle and cunning. It has a tremendous advantage to start with. It deals with self, self-preservation, self-esteem, self-centredness, selfishness and self-gratification. It is the father of the “me” generation. This system is highly developed and easily embraced, simply because it appeals to the flesh. And how gratifying it is when something appeals to the flesh.

But why should Paul speak to Christians, of all people, in this way? After all, he is talking to people who have “put off the old man” in baptism and put on the new. But baptism, as we know, is only a start on a road that leads to the Kingdom. That “old man” is still there. He never really dies until we are made immortal. He loves to be pampered and satisfied. This is why Jesus tells us to crucify the flesh daily. Get in that habit of crucifying the flesh. Keep it as dead as possible on a daily basis.

We are no different than the Corinthians of Paul’s time or the Children of Israel in the wilderness. We are all subject to that “*lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh and the pride of life.*” This is our greatest hindrance to “occupy till He come.” We don’t have to go to school to learn about this philosophy. It is drilled into us from the cradle to the grave. We find it in almost everything we read and see and hear. We are subconsciously affected, unless we consciously resist. There’s a saying in the world is so true, “Birds of a feather, flock together.” Bro. Roberts puts it this way, and we quote: “We always speak like the company we keep. If we are all the while among the foul-mouthed gabbers of the flesh, we cannot expect to be free of their Sodomite brogue. If we read nothing but the literature of atheistical refinement, we shall never rise above that thin, proper, superficial, cold talk in which a practically godless state of mind expresses itself.”

An example, we are at different ages baptised into the Truth, young, middle-aged and older. There are different things that will affect us in the world. Popular mediums of appeal to the motions of the flesh are increasing in ungodly expression, and their devotees identify with the scenes depicted. Even political tides on the local and international arena becomes matters of personal debate. If we should read a book, a novel, or exercise our minds with any of the world’s pastimes, we are exposing ourselves to the dangerous influence of all that is evil, for this reason. First, we are receiving in our minds a world of fantasy, an unreal world, and if that book or plot has to deal with a wicked villain and an innocent victim, it is very easy to get so engrossed in those in the story that we are helping them make decisions in our own mind. Because we are engrossed, we become part of the plot and we don’t correct ourselves. That old man of the flesh just keeps making these decisions. We think of revenge. And what does the Bible say about thinking? “As a man thinketh, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). We are saying, in effect, as we think these things, that “if we were in the same position, we would do the same.” The old man comes to the fore, and if we don’t stop to correct him, we continue on with the story, making spur-of-the-minute decisions as a reaction to what is happening.

This is the real problem. We can plan our lives by knowing the Truth and say we are going to do this, that or something else, and have the best of intentions and all of it is correct, but if we have put certain worldly ways into our mind by partaking of its offerings and something unexpected happens, we react in the wrong way immediately. And when we react, that’s the real us. We will be judged on reactions at the judgment more than actions. Think about that, consider it well. The real person comes out in reactions. But we tend to rationalise. The philosophy of the world says, “I’m due a little entertainment; I’ve been denied this, or I’ve been denied that. Life is just passing me by. I don’t feel fulfilled. I believe it is time I think of ‘me’ for a change.” But what does the Bible say?

“*If you suffer with him, you shall reign with him.*”

“*Through much tribulation shall we enter the Kingdom.*”

“*Be content in whatever state you find yourself.*”

“*Think of your brethren as better than yourself.*”

“*Be always abounding in the work of the Lord.*”

“Present your bodies a living sacrifice.”

“Suffer yourselves to be defrauded.”

Granted, pleasurable things are hard to give up, but let us make a beginning if we really want salvation and to please God. A suggestion like this—we want to turn the tables around. For every hour we spend in doing something we want to do, or some type of pleasure, spend at least an equal amount of time in real honest study of the Word of God and the Works of the Truth. If we do this constantly, with complete sincerity, we will be surprised with the results. We are told the Word of God is quick and powerful. It can and will make a difference in our lives. We will see then just how shallow these great pleasures of the world really are. It will be easier for us to attend all classes and lectures and be completely supportive of all ecclesial work. What will be our answer as we stand before the Lord and have to answer for things we have done? Things that we have put ahead of things of the Truth? What was so important that we could not be with the brethren and sisters on every available occasion in the work of the vineyard?

Paul exhorts us to *“lay aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”* (Hebrews 12:1). The race that Paul speaks of includes every phase of our life. All needs to be examined. The people we spend time with, the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, then hobbies on which we consume time, the things we read, the pleasures we pursue. We have to consider in each case, “would the Lord himself do the same?” Let us, with Paul, cast away these wastes. Just cast them aside.

The next time we get advice, the next time a suggestion is made, the next time we are enticed or tempted, let’s check it with the Word of God. I don’t mean just open it up and see what we can find, I mean “the word of God that is hidden in our hearts.” Check it out. If it doesn’t comply, cast it away, it’s the philosophy of the world, and it will prevent us from occupying till the Lord returns.

But there’s another “philosophy” that we have to be aware of and that is other groups of Christadelphians in these latter days who have dreamed up a philosophy that we should all be together after all. “Have we not the same works of the truth; do we not read the same Bible and have the same first principles? Whatever happened before that caused these divisions was before our time and we don’t really know what happened. There were a lot of personalities involved, let’s start from here and go on together and do work in the vineyard until the Lord comes.” This is their philosophy of compromise. This is their contention of how to “occupy,” but that’s not the Spirit’s instruction of how we should “occupy.” That is making concessions.

As we come together to partake of these emblems of him who occupied faithfully in all his ways in God’s service, let us be very sure that we are standing fast in the faith, that we are holding firm to the purity of the doctrine and obedience. This is what will really count. Let us be very careful concerning all the philosophies that are spread abroad with enticing words and fair speeches.

We have looked at some of the negative things that Paul has said, those things to beware of, but he was also very positive.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

“I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable (or logical) service” (Romans 12:1).

“And be not conformed to this world (or age) but be ye transformed by the renewing of our minds that ye may prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God” (Romans 12:2).

There should be no doubt in our minds about these instructions Paul gives. They are very simple, very direct, and all of them point to one thing — *“Occupy till the Lord Comes.”* And if we use these instructions of Paul, in following them, we will be doing what Jesus said — *“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matthew 6:33). That kingdom is what is reserved for those

who will be regarded as righteous or blessed or happy when he does return and gives them eternal life. The righteous will be blessed with victory over death, will have eternal, never-ending life.

They will reign with a victorious Messiah who has returned from heaven to a renovated earth—one likened unto the Garden of Eden, where the glory and knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea and all will know Deity from the least to the greatest; when all sorrow and disease will disappear. Ferocious animals will become tame and loveable as the household kitten. Swords will be beaten into plowshares and the plowman will overtake the reaper. The desert shall blossom as the rose. These are a few of the glimpses that we are given of the first thousand years of eternity, just the first thousand. Of the rest the Apostle Paul said it was unlawful for him to speak. He saw it but was unable to tell us about it, probably because we are not now, in our mortal condition, able to fathom the blessings to come. All we know of that divine age is that all wickedness will be gone from the earth, no wicked people will be left at all, mortality, sin and death forever removed, God dwelling with man, the whole earth filled with His glory.

Could we want anything more? Could we actually imagine anything better? We know how close it is, for our readings tell us. In the 38th chapter of Ezekiel, written about a thousand years before there was ever a country called Russia, Ezekiel names them, tells us exactly what they are going to do, and we are witnessing this prophecy coming to pass before our very eyes. In John chapter 4, Jesus, on his journey to Galilee from Judea, stops with the Gentile Samaritans for 2 days (typical of 2,000 years), and that 2,000 years is almost up. So, it is very close. We know that his return is imminent. Do we truly want that promised reward, that brief description of the Kingdom found in the words of Israel's prophets? Do we want it? If we do want it, and if we ask what do we do to get it, his answer is very simple — "*Occupy till I come.*"—D.N.
