

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – A Royal Priesthood – 8-14 April 2017

Christ is our High Priest. “But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Contrary to Lesson writer’s assertion that Peter takes the Old Testament language because he was ‘immersed as he is in Jewish culture,’ rather, it is because like the prophets of old in whom “the Spirit of Christ was in them” (1 Peter 1:11) Peter also spoke as he was moved by the Spirit of Christ. The Priesthood of which Peter talks about here is not just Jewish, it is to all who have come to Christ, the Living Stone, and thus “as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (verses 4-5).

Sunday: Living as a Christian – Peter says, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:1-2). Let us learn of Joseph.

Joseph’s brothers were envious of him; their envy was the outgrowth of their own wicked hearts, “For where envy and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16). A corrupt heart is the only soil in which envy can grow. There is not a particle of evidence that Joseph did any wrong. He is one of the few Bible characters concerning whom no evil is recorded. His father loved him more than all of his sons, because he was more worthy of his love than they were. The same thing moved his brothers to think of killing him, and afterward to sell him, that moved Cain to kill Abel; because their own works were evil, as his were righteous. We do not mean to intimate that Joseph was without faults; but he certainly had the fear of God before his eyes. It is worthwhile in passing, to note the features in which Joseph’s experience resembled that of Christ. Joseph was hated by his brethren; Christ came unto His own, and His own received Him not, neither did His brethren believe in Him.

Joseph was sold into slavery; Christ was sold to His enemies. Both suffered, not on their own account, but they might deliver others. Of course it is not designed to place Joseph on the same plane with Christ, but he may be considered as in some respects a type of Christ.

If it was wrong to allow envy and jealousy to control the heart in those days it is equally wrong now. Indeed, it would seem that in this age of gospel light and privileges, with the experience of men for ages past written out for our learning, it must be worst then to indulge in such feelings now than then. And, so, it is more dangerous now than then. The nearness of the coming of the Lord is given as a special reason why peace and love should prevail. Says the apostle: “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned; behold, the Judge standeth before the door” (James 5:9). What a terrible thing it would be if he should open the door and find us thus engaged. “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:1-5). “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Monday: The Living Stone – Christ is the living Stone, and in His heart is the law of God. Only a shadow of the law appears in books or on tables; the real law is alive. The two tables of law – the heart of Christ – were also broken; but even that did not put an end to the law, for He died only to live again. His heart on which the law is written, was broken, in order that the law might issue forth to us in a stream of light. This is the real law-giving. Thus by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5) from all sin, – transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), – because the Sun of righteousness never sets, but arises with healing in His wings (Malachi 4:2). His life, as we accept it and yield to it, works in us the righteousness of the law; and because the law of life is eternal we also have life eternal. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Colossians 2:6). Enoch walked with God (Genesis 5:24), and had the testimony that he pleased God. If it was possible for him then, it must also be possible for us now to walk with God and to please Him. The way for us to please God is to keep His commandments by faith in Christ Jesus, and then whatsoever we ask we

shall receive of Him. Shall we not seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then all things that our Heavenly Father sees we have need of shall be added unto us?

Tuesday: God's Covenant People – We are God's covenant people because God has covenanted with us. What covenant has God made? To understand this covenant, we need to understand the distinction between the "New Covenant" and the "Old covenant." The New was before the Old, and the New is The Covenant – it seems confusing, but it needs not be.

The New Covenant is God's one-sided promise to write His holy law on human hearts – the Old covenant is the vain promise of the people at Mt Sinai to obey perfectly. The New is 'Believe and live' – the Old is 'Obey and live.' The New says that salvation is totally by God's grace through faith – the Old says salvation is by faith but it is also by our good works. The New Covenant is a heart-appreciation of the love (*agape*) which constrains to perfect heart obedience (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) – the Old is egocentric 'trust' motivated by hope of reward or by fear of punishment. The New Covenant is everlasting – the Old covenant is temporal. The New Covenant produces 'under grace' motivation – the Old is the spiritual experience of being "under the law," or under reward/fear motivation, it "gendereth to bondage" (Galatians 4:21-24). The New Covenant says justification is entirely of grace – the Old says justification is by our obedience. The New is righteousness by a faith 'which works' – the Old is by our own 'sanctified works.' The New wants Christ to return for His honour and vindication – the Old covenant wants Christ to return for our own reward, 'so we can go home to glory.'

The New Covenant begun in Eden. The New Covenant in its simplicity is God putting "the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Galatians 4:6) which causes you to fulfill His Law of Love – "for without Me," Christ declared, "ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, the Covenant – the one-sided promise of God – was made. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). "The covenant of grace was first made with man in Eden, when after the Fall there was given divine promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. To all men this covenant offered pardon and the assisting grace of God for future obedience through faith in Christ" {PP 370.2}. "This same covenant was renewed to Abraham in the promise, 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' Genesis 22:18. This promise pointed to Christ. So Abraham understood it (see Galatians 3:8, 16), and he trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. It was this faith that was accounted unto him for righteousness. The covenant with Abraham also maintained the authority of God's law" {PP 370.3}. Note that Abraham made no promise in return; all he did was believe the Lord's promise (Genesis 15:6). The Lord's promise was the 'new' covenant.

Wednesday: A Royal Priesthood – We are called out from darkness to light. It was to this end that God called His people out of Egypt. They were 'called out,' and so they constituted the church of the living God, for the Greek word which is rendered "church," means literally 'called out.' God calls people out from the world, that they may be a "spiritual house, a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5); and His presence in them makes them "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (verse 9); and they "show forth" the praises of Him who have called them out of darkness into His marvellous light, because He who dwells in them shines forth. That this was the object of God's calling Israel of Egypt is seen from His words in Exodus 19:3-6: "And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

Thursday: Proclaiming the Praises – "Praise ye Him, sun and moon: praise Him, all ye stars of light" (Psalm 148:3). We are also called to join with the stars in declaring God's praises – "That ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you" (1 Peter 2:9). The stars do it by reflecting the light of God's glory: "Let your light so shine" (Matthew 5:16). The firmament witnesses to His wonderful handwork: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). The firmament manifest His glory: "The Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee" (Isaiah 60:2). Let it be so.