

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – The Cry of the Prophets – 27 July-2 August 2019

Christ would have us heed the cry of the prophets who call His people to repentance. One of these cries is for us to not to be indifferent to the needy. This is summed up in the memory text: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what *is* good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8). Whoever is touched by the love of God will recognise that everything good comes from the Lord, and will hold whatever material things he has as the Lord’s, and will not feel that he is making a sacrifice when he yields up some or all of it to the cause of God.

Sunday: The Recurring Call to Justice – A call to justice was made necessary not least because Israel desired to be in league with the inhabitants of the land. A league implies likeness, equality, the union of two similar powers. But Israel, when true to its calling, had nothing in common with the inhabitants of the land. They were to be a separate people – separate solely because of the sanctifying presence of the Lord. When God said to Moses, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest,” Moses replied, “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? is it not in that Thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth” (Exodus 33:14-16). To make a league with the nations round them, was to be joined to them, and that meant separation from the presence of God. The presence of God was the one thing that would make and keep the people of Israel separate from the nations, and His presence could have no other effect than that very thing. The presence of God will do the same thing for Seventh-day Adventists today, for He changes not. The recurring call to justice is first of all a call to the people of God to be separate from the nations – to have God’s presence.

But Israel desired to be like the nations. Read the account in 1 Samuel 8. The people said to Samuel, “Give us a king to judge us like all the nations.” In the Bible the “nations” are the heathen. The Hebrew word that is often rendered “nations” is the identical word from which the word “heathen” always comes. Psalms 96:5 makes it clear: “For all the gods of the nations are idols; but the Lord made the heavens.” Here it is very evident that the “nations” are heathen. In Psalms 2:1 where we read, “Why do the *heathen* rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” other versions say: “Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” A “nation” in God’s use of the term, when speaking of earthly nations, is a collection of heathen. What the Jews really said was this: “We will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the heathen.” That was what they wanted, because all other people acknowledged other gods than Jehovah, and all the people on earth, with the exception of Israel, had kings over them. God’s plan for Israel was that they should not be a *nation*. We are apt to look at what was, as though it was what ought to have been, forgetting that from first to last the people refused, to a greater or less extent, to walk in the counsel of God. We see the Jews with judges, and officers, and all the paraphernalia of civil government; but we must remember that God’s covenant provided something far different, which, on account of unbelief, they never fully realised. What is God’s plan for us as Seventh-day Adventists?

Monday: Amos – Among other things, Amos calls for Israel to worship the true God. “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst. They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beersheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again” (Amos 8:12-14). Verse 12 illustrates the sense of loss. There will be those who wander about looking for the word of the Lord but cannot find it. The reason for this drought is the sin of Samaria (verse 14). What was the sin of Samaria? In 1 Kings 16:31-33, Ahab came to be king of Israel and ruled from Samaria and there he set up an idol to Baal and worshipped there. Previous to him, Jeroboam set up two idols (golden calves), one in Dan and one in Bethel (1 Kings 12:26-31). God had instructed Israel not to swear by any other gods (Joshua 23:7) but by the name of the living God (Deuteronomy 10:20; 6:13).

Today, the battle over worship, the choice between false gods and the true God, is alive within Adventism. Amos warns: “I saw the Lord standing upon the altar: and He said, Smite

the lintel of the door, that the posts may shake: and cut them in the head, all of them; and I will slay the last of them with the sword: he that fleeth of them shall not flee away, and he that escapeth of them shall not be delivered. Though they dig into hell, thence shall Mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down” (Amos 9:1-2). This is a stern warning with dire consequences and relates directly to whom we worship.

Jesus said to the woman at the well, Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). The Samaritans did not know whom they were worshipping. They were worshipping a god of their own devising. The Jews on the other hand were worshipping the Father in Heaven and of them Jesus said “we know whom we worship.” There is a famine coming! Do we know whom we worship? Is our God the true God or have we bowed to the modern Baal gods? “This is eternal life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Our Father is the only true God. Jesus Christ, the Son of the one true God, who has inherited all things from His Father, has directed us to worship His Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

Tuesday: Micah – The prophet Micah, with a just sense of the requirements of God, said: “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:6-8). Let no one suppose that in the old times the Lord required men to make material sacrifices and that the Lord now requires only spiritual sacrifices. He never required anything but spiritual sacrifices, for no man could ever offer any other. He has prepared the sacrifice, and given it freely to man, so that man may have wherewith to offer an acceptable sacrifice to Him. Back then it was the heart touched by the gift of Christ, that made the offering of value. But now, as well as then, he whose heart has felt the love of God will gladly recognise the fact that everything good comes from the Lord, and will therefore hold whatever material things he may have as the Lord’s, and will not feel that he is making a sacrifice when he yields up some of it, or all of it, to the cause of God.

Wednesday: Ezekiel – The presence of God is substituted by idol worship in the hearts of professed people of God. “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?” (Ezekiel 14:3). This is a picture of the church and what is happening in the minds of church members. There is confusion over worship in the church, and in the mind of church members, just before the close of probation. Idolatry begins in the heart, begins in the mind, and a false understanding or conception of God is idolatry. “Are we worshippers of Jehovah, or of Baal? Of the living God, or of idols?” {5T 173.3} “No outward shrines may be visible; there may be no image for the eye to rest upon, yet we may be practicing idolatry. It is as easy to make an idol of cherished ideas or objects as to fashion gods of wood or stone. Thousands have a false conception of God and his attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal. Are we worshipping the true God as He is revealed in His word, in Christ, in nature, or are we adoring some philosophical idol enshrined in His place?” {5T 173.4}. The true God is the Father (John 17:3), and we see it here very clearly that it is the Father who is revealed in His word, in Christ, and in nature. Are we worshipping mysterious gods that we cannot find in the Bible or do we hold beliefs in false conception of God or are we worshipping something else – a philosophical idol enshrined in God’s place.

Thursday: Isaiah – We are to bear burdens of others, knowing that Christ is our burden-bearer. “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:4, 6). This is what makes it easy to bear one another’s burdens. If we know that Christ bears our burdens, it will become a pleasure for us to bear the burdens of others. The trouble is that too often we forget that Christ is the Burden-bearer, and, being over powered with the weight of our own infirmities, we have still less patience with those of others. When we know that Christ is indeed the burden-bearer, we cast our own care upon Him; then when we make the burden of another our own, He bears that too.