

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – Jesus and Those in Need – 10-16 August 2019

Christ began His earthly ministry by reading in the synagogue at Nazareth the following words from Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19). And then He said to the congregation, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

In this week’s commentary, we will take a general view (not section by section of the Lesson) and focus on the memory text (text quoted above) in the context of Christ’s ministry to those in need. The whole import of the text is that Christ came to give freedom in every sense of the word. It is charged with the idea of liberty, and that to an extent that few realise. We shall be amply repaid for taking a closer study of it, and meditating upon it afterwards.

The word “liberty,” in Luke 4:18, quoted from Isaiah 61:1, that Christ was anointed “to proclaim liberty to the captives,” is from a Hebrew word, the primary signification of which is “a swallow.” This noun is derived from a verb which signifies ‘to wheel in flight,’ like a bird in the air. From this it is easy to see how the word came to signify “freedom” and “liberty.”

We learn, therefore, that the Bible idea of liberty is best represented by the graceful flight of a swallow through the air. We often use the figure, ‘as free as a bird,’ and that exactly expresses the liberty wherewith Christ makes us (those in need who accept Christ) free. Is it not a glorious thing? O what a sense of freedom thrills the soul at the very thought of it!

Sin is bondage. Jesus said, “Verily, verily I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin” (John 8:34). Not only is the sinner in bondage, but he is in prison. The Apostle Paul says, “The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed” (Galatians 3:22-23). The word “concluded” means, literally, “shut up together.” All sinners are in bondage, shut up together in prison, condemned to hard labour. The end of sin is death (James 1:15).

Consequently the sinner is not only shut up in prison, condemned to hard, unprofitable labour, but he has the fear of death continually before him. It is from this that Christ delivers us (see Hebrews 2:14-15). So we read in Psalms 102:19-20, “For He hath looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death.” Christ says, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). “Free indeed.” With the knowledge already gained from Isaiah 61:1, we can easily grasp the fulness of that freedom or liberty.

Imagine a bird that has been caught, and shut up in a cage. It longs for freedom, but the cruel bars make that impossible. Someone comes along and opens the door. The bird sees the opening, but has so often been deceived in his attempts to gain his liberty, that he hesitates. He hops down, finds that his prison is really open, trembles a moment for very joy at the thought of liberty, then spreads his wings and wheels through the air with such rapture as can be known only by one who has been a captive. “Free indeed.” As free as a bird. This is the liberty wherewith Christ frees the captive of sin. Free as a bird, indeed, was the experience of the Psalmist, as we read from the Scriptures as follows: “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers, the snare is broken, and we are escaped” (Psalms 124:7). And this is the experience of every one who truly and without reserve accepts Christ.

But it is the truth that gives this freedom; for Christ says, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). He is the truth, and His word is truth. The Psalmist says, “Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy law is the truth” (Psalms 119:142). And he also says, “I will walk at liberty, for I seek Thy precepts” (Psalms 119:45). This is literally, ‘I will walk in a broad place, for I seek Thy precepts;’ and this fits with what we learn in verse 96: “I have seen an end of all perfection; but Thy commandment is exceeding broad.” The commandments of God form an exceedingly broad place in which all may walk who seek them. God’s laws are the truth, and it is the truth that gives freedom.

“The law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14). That is, the law is the nature of God, for “the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). As the

Spirit of God was in Christ, He could proclaim liberty to the captives of sin. Paul who once was a slave "sold under sin," says: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For *the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free* from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

The law of God was, and is, in the heart of Christ (Psalm 40:8). Out of the heart are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23); therefore the life of Christ is the law of God. When men attempt to keep the law in their own strength, they invariably get into bondage, just as surely as though they wilfully broke it. The only difference is that in the latter case they are willing captive slaves, while in the former they are unwilling slaves. In Christ alone the perfect righteousness of the law is found, and therefore His life is "the law of liberty," into which we are exhorted continually to look (James 1:25; Hebrews 12:2). The law that shuts up to sure death the man who is out of Christ, becomes sure life and liberty to the man who is in Christ.

We have seen that the "commandment is exceeding broad." How broad? – Just as broad as the life of God. Therefore the liberty, or the "broad place" in which one can walk who seeks the law of God, is the breadth of God's mind, which comprehends the universe. This is "the glorious liberty of the children of God." "His commandments are not grievous," but on the contrary are life and liberty to all who accept them "as the truth is in Jesus." God has not given us the spirit of bondage, but has called us to the liberty which He Himself enjoys; for if we believe His word we are His sons, – "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ."

Only the Son of God can give such liberty as this. No man can give it, and no earthly power can take it away. We have seen that no man can get it by his own efforts to keep the law of God. The greatest human efforts can result in nothing but bondage. Therefore when civil governments enact laws requiring men to follow a certain religious custom, they are simply forging fetters for them; because religion by law means a religion of purely human power. It is not the man who *tries* to do right, that is free, but the man who actually *does* right. But no man does the truth, except the one whose works are wrought in him by Christ.

The liberty which Christ gives is liberty of the soul. It is liberty from the bondage of sin. That, and that alone is real religious liberty. It is found nowhere but in the religion of Jesus Christ. The man who has that liberty is free even in a prison cell. The slave who has this true liberty from Christ is infinitely more at liberty than his cruel master, even though he be a king.

And now one more word of encouragement to the slave of sin, who is heart sick because of his bondage, and who is discouraged through the failure of repeated attempts to escape from "the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1). Freedom is yours, if you will but take it. Liberty has already been proclaimed. Your prison doors are already open, and you have only to believe it, and to walk out, continually believing it. Christ has gained the victory over Satan, and has passed through his prison house, taking away the keys. There is no fetter that can bind the soul that accepts His salvation. He has purchased every soul, and has loosed their bonds so that they may be free to serve Him. With the prison doors open, there is no excuse for anyone to remain in bondage. If anyone remains in bondage after Christ's proclamation comes to him, it is because he loves bondage more than liberty.

Christ is proclaiming liberty to you, for He loosed your bonds (Psalms 116:16). He has opened this prison door so you may walk at liberty, if you will only walk by faith in Him. It is faith that opens the door to the one who is shut up in sin. Believe His word, declare yourself free in His name, and then by faith stand fast in liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

Then will you know the blessedness of the assurance: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). How long must we wait on the Lord before we find renewed strength? You must wait upon Him all the time, as long as you live, without cessation. Then must we wait till, the end of our life before gaining strength? Most certainly not. The Lord does not say, that you will get strength after long waiting, but while waiting. You wait on the Lord by accepting His word as the guide of your life; as soon as you do this, your strength will begin to renew. You will not instantly receive all the strength you will ever have; but your inward Man – the life of Christ within you – will be "rewarded day by day." Thus you "go from strength to strength" until you appear in Zion before God. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."