

## Sabbath School Lesson #8 – “The Least of These” – 17-23 August 2019

**C**hrist tells us: “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done *it* unto Me” (Matthew 25:40). “He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord” (Proverbs 19:17). The grace of Christ, of which we are made stewards, is the grace of giving. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). As He showed His love for us by giving Himself for us, so we show our love for Him by giving ourselves to others. This we may do, even if we have no money. Strength is that by which money is earned, and therefore he who gives his strength for the welfare of others gives more than the one who gives thousands in money, but withholds himself.

In dealing with humanity, Christ fully identifies Himself with suffering humanity. He says: “*I* was an hungered,” “*I* was thirsty,” “*I* was a stranger,” “*I* was sick,” “*I* was in prison.” He says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto *Me*.” So completely is it that “the Word became flesh.” Furthermore it is “the Son of Man,” before whom “shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another.” And the Father “hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man.” Thus the case of every member of the human family is committed to Him who was in all things “made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” How wonderfully are the love and mercy of God revealed in His dealings with His erring children!

There is no thought which is given greater prominence in the word of God than the expression “Thy kingdom come.” Paul in Titus 2:13, calls it “the blessed hope.” It was that to which the church in all ages looked forward, as the brightest prospect which their faith revealed, and the realisation of their fondest hopes. In the heart of every true Christian this thought, this hope, will be uppermost. We are taught to give it this prominence by the Lord Himself. In the sermon on the mount, the first utterance is one concerning the coming kingdom: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Other sentences which follow allude to the same thing. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” This inheritance cannot be until the coming of the kingdom, by which the wicked shall be destroyed (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9), and the earth made ready for its future inheritors (Psalms 37:10-11). “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” The time of comfort of the saints is when “the tabernacle of God is with men,” and “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying” (Revelation 21:3-4). “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” They shall see Him at the coming of His kingdom. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The blessings which come to the poor in spirit, the meek, the pure in heart, and other possessors of heavenly graces, are many in this life; but they are not to be compared with those that will be realised at the coming of the kingdom of God. But let us focus on the blessing for the meek.

“Blessed are the meek,” said Christ in His sermon on the mount. And the reason there assigned is, “For they shall inherit the earth.” But there is a present blessing in meekness as well as a future one. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and a natural accompaniment of that “love, joy, peace,” which is the Christian’s heritage in this life, as well as in that to come. Without meekness there can be no real enjoyment of spiritual blessings. The person who will take honour and glory to himself cannot be altogether at peace with Him who claims all honour and glory and power as due to Himself. So far as a man ascribes these to himself, he makes himself a rival of God. He cannot under such circumstances love God with all his might, mind and strength. Meekness is in short the opposite of selfishness, which strikes directly against all the fruits of the Spirit, causing an individual to take to himself that which belongs alone to God. And in taking to self that which is God’s – or attempting to do so – an individual does not in reality get anything, and loses all that which God is able to give him.

But what is meekness? It may be said, in the first place, that Christian meekness (which is the only true meekness) is not altogether what it is popularly supposed to be. The most

common idea of meekness allies it with weakness, – lack of will. It pictures the meek person as one who makes little or no resistance to persons or things that set themselves against him. But this idea of meekness is entirely false. It has no place in the make-up of the meek characters of the Scripture record. It should be evident, at a glance, that God's Spirit, which is all-powerful, cannot produce as one of its fruits anything that lacks force and strength.

Meekness is not the absence of will, but the absence of self. Among Scripture characters with whom the idea of meekness is naturally associated, probably none are more prominent than Moses, and John, the disciple of Christ. The record of Moses is that he "was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). But no one at all familiar with the events of his life could think of him as a weak character, or lacking in resoluteness and power of will. While he persistently refused to be the father of a great nation, or to be angry with those who murmured against him, he was never slow to take vigorous measures for the suppression of idolatry and other sins, no matter how great the number arrayed against him. He was, indeed, one of the most energetic and forceful characters that the world has ever seen. The same decision of character was possessed by John. John was an apt pupil in the school of Christ, and his natural traits of character were tempered by the lessons he there received. But while self was repressed, there was no loss in force of will. And this is evident from a glance at his epistles to the church. No one of the inspired writers, indeed, uses plainer, more forceful language than does John. His speech, like the speech of Paul, was "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4). He simply let himself become a mouthpiece of the Spirit and an instrument of Omnipotence, and decision enforced appeared as an inevitable consequence in all that he said and did.

The foundation of meekness is the conviction that the best place for us to be is the place where God wants us to be. If that place is up above the heads of others, it is all right; and if it is down under their feet, it is just as well. Wherever it may be, it is the only place we can afford to be in. We cannot afford to occupy a high place when God wants us to fill a humble one; we cannot afford to remain in a humble place when God wants us to fill one higher up.

There is a selfishness which affects humility as well as one which is proud. Moses displayed a touch of the former at the burning bush in the desert, when he begged to be released from going before Pharaoh, on the plea that he was too humble an instrument to accomplish the work; and there have been many since his day who evaded responsibilities in the work of God under the same plea. But such humility is only professed, not real. True humility never rebels against God's purposes under any pretext whatever. True humility is the absence of self, so that so far as the individual is concerned, there is nothing in the way of the accomplishment of God's will in any direction. One of the greatest blessings of meekness is the peace which it brings into the individual's daily life. For if he is fully persuaded that the place God wants him to be in is the best place for him and the only place he can afford to be in, all chance for murmuring is taken out of his life. He simply feels that "all things work together for good to them that love God," and leaves the result with Him. He has "godliness with contentment" which, the apostle says, "is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).

But how will he know when he is in the position that God wants him to fill? The Bible has answered this question. The Psalmist says, "the meek will He guide in judgment; the meek will He teach His way" (Psalms 25:9). The meek person is the only one that God can teach, because he is the only one that will not trust in his own wisdom. It is with the meek person that God dwells, and that he should be led of God when God dwells with him, is inevitable. We are told that "the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity," said, "I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15-18). Thus the meek person dwells with God, and in whatever place he may be, he knows that God is there too. God never asks an individual to be in a humbler place than He is willing to be in Himself.

The meek person dwells with God. He is safe; he is contented; he has instruction in the ways of the Highest. He will be hid in the day of the Lord's anger (Zephaniah 2:3). He will inherit the earth (Psalms 37:11). He is willing, for all this, to give up self. Truly we can well afford to exchange the highest position that earth can offer for the lowest place that God wants us to fill. The highest position without God is lower than the lowest place with Him.