

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – Why Witness? – 27 June-3 July 2020

Christ has commissioned us to be His witnesses to a dying and lost world. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). But all men will not be saved. Millions say to the Spirit of God: “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;” millions refuse to give it any recognition (Acts 24:25).

Sunday: Providing Opportunities for Salvation – Like Paul, we are given opportunity for salvation. To the Romans, he said, “Called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God” (Romans 1:1). To the Galatians, he said that God “separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by His grace” (Galatians 1:15). That God chose Saul to be an apostle, before Saul himself had any thought that he should ever be even a Christian, is evident from the sacred narrative. On his way to Damascus, whither, “breathing out threatenings and slaughter,” he was proceeding with full authority to seize, bind, and drag to prison all Christians, both men and women, Saul was suddenly arrested, not by human hands, but by the overpowering glory of the Lord. Three days afterward the Lord said to Ananias, when sending him to give Saul his sight, “He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles” (Acts 9:15). God arrested Saul in his mad career of persecution, because He had chosen him to be an apostle. So we see that the pricks against which Saul had been kicking were the strivings of the Spirit to turn him to the work to which he had been called.

But how long before this had Saul been chosen to be the messenger of the Lord? – He himself tells us that he was separated from his mother’s womb. From his birth Saul had been “separated unto the Gospel of God.” This was no new thing. The work of Samson and of John the Baptist was laid out for them before they were born (see Judges 13:2-14; Luke 1:13-17). Jeremiah was chosen before his birth to be a prophet of God (Jer. 1:4-5). Pharaoh, the haughty, defiant king of Egypt, had also been chosen to make the name of God known throughout all the earth (Exodus 9:15-16), but he refused to do it as the acknowledged servant of the Lord, and so the work had been accomplished through his obstinacy.

Talking of opportunities for salvation, these things but remind us that chance does not rule in this world. It is as true of all men as it was of the Thessalonians, that “God hath from the beginning chosen” them “to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). It rests with every one to make that calling and election sure. And he who “willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4), has also appointed “to every man his work” (Mark 13:34). He who leaves not Himself without witness even in the inanimate creation (Acts 14:17; Romans 1:20), would fain have man, His highest earthly creation, willingly give such witness to Him as can be given only by human intelligence. All men are chosen to be witnesses for God, and to each is his labour appointed. All through life the Spirit of God is striving with every man, to induce him to allow himself to be used for the work to which God has called him. Only the judgment day will reveal what wonderful opportunities men have recklessly flung away. Saul, the violent persecutor, became the mighty apostle. Who can imagine how much good might have been done by the men whose great power over their fellows has been exerted only for evil, if they had yielded to the influence of the Spirit of God? Not every one can be a Paul; but the thought that each one, according to the ability that God has given him, is chosen and called of God to witness for Him, will, when once grasped, give to life a new meaning.

Monday: Making Jesus Glad – Nothing can make Jesus glad than that “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11). When He came into this world, as the plan of God was gradually unfolded, at each step of the way He delighted to do the will of the Father, until He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” And at the cross, it was the hiding of His Father’s face through “the iniquity of us all,” which was laid upon Him, that broke the heart of Jesus, that the healing stream of His life blood might flow forth to wash away all the sin that separates us from God. Hear the bitter cry of Jesus just before He laid down His precious life: “My God, My God, why hast *Thou* forsaken Me!” To make Jesus glad, I ought to say, “I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Galatians 2:21). This is the summing up of the

relationship of the law to Christ. If righteousness came by the law, then there would have been no use for the death of Christ. The law itself can do nothing except point out men's duty; therefore, to speak of righteousness coming by the law, means by our works, by our individual effort. So the text is equivalent to the statement that if we could save ourselves, Christ died for nothing; for salvation is the one thing to be gained. Well, we cannot save ourselves; and Christ is not dead in vain; therefore there is salvation in Him. He is able to save all that come unto God by Him. Some must be saved, else He has died in vain; but He has not died in vain; therefore, the promise is sure: "He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand, He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:10-11). "Whosoever will," may be of the number. Since He died not in vain, see to it "that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."

We make Jesus glad when we 'fight' sin by Him. In 'fighting' against sin, the fundamental principle is self-forgetfulness. The only thing we need deliverance from is sin; when we have that, we have everything worth having, both in this world and in the world to come. We know that the prayer of Jesus was answered, for "in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayer and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death," He "was heard" (Hebrews 5:7). Although in the flesh, "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3), as weak as the weakest man that ever lived, for no man can be weaker than to be able to do nothing of himself (see John 5:30), – yet His prayer "was heard" to save us from sin. But, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save" – was true of Christ on the cross. The same must be true of us; and the same spirit of absorbed interest in others, and self-forgetfulness, must be in even our most earnest prayer for personal help, if we would pray the prayer that is certain to be answered. When we come to the throne of grace absorbed in the thought that it is Jesus who is pleading to be delivered from the sins that so beset us, that it is He and not we who appear before God, and we lose thought of ourselves in our interest in His being satisfied with the travail of His soul bearing our sin, then we are saved. Our personality is lost in His; we lose ourselves in Him; and then comes the thrilling thought, He was heard! He gained victory over this very trial! Human words cannot describe the joy of the thought, for it is "the joy of the Lord", which is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

Tuesday: Growing by Giving – "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). These are the words of the Lord Jesus, who speaks with authority in this matter, for He "gave Himself for us," and giving Himself, He gave all things. "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). That there is profit in giving is seen from the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:3: "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." There is no blessing to be received if one gives without love; but if love prompts the gift, there is profit to the giver. Love is the soil out of which all good grows. It was Christ's love that led Him to give Himself for us. Love is the priceless gift; money cannot be compared with it, and all the wealth of the world cannot buy it. Therefore he who gives love, gives everything, the bestowal of his goods must necessarily accompany the gift. And even though he has no goods to bestow, in giving love he bestows infinitely more than the one who gives millions of money without love. The blessing, therefore, of giving is the rich blessing of love.

Wednesday: Faithfulness to Christ's Command – Let us be faithful to Christ's gospel commission – bringing souls to Christ, for only "He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). The gospel is the Lord's remedy for sin. But sin is the transgression of the ten commandments (1 John 3:4 and Romans 7:7). Wherever sin is it is evidence that the law is there, and violated. The Lord would not apply His remedy where it is not needed; but He has sent the gospel through us, and we are to faithfully carry the gospel every creature.

Thursday: Motivated by Love – We must be delivered from egocentric motivation based on fear of punishment or desire for reward. We need genuine Christocentric motivation. It was to save others that Christ consented to die at the cross. At the cross, there was no egocentric motivation in Christ. Only the love for others motivated Christ – that was *agape*! It is the *agape* of Christ that delivers us from egocentric motivation, for "the love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) when we behold His matchless *agape* at the cross.