

Sabbath School Lesson #13 – A Step *in* Faith – 19-25 September 2020

Christ would have us take a step in faith. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:5-7). Christ lived by the Father (John 6:57). His faith in the word that God gave Him was such that He repeatedly and positively maintained that when He died He should rise again the third day. In this faith Christ died, saying, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit” (Luke 23:46). That faith which gave Him the victory over death (Hebrews 5:7), because it gave Him the complete victory over sin, is the faith which He exercises in us, when He dwells in us *by faith*; for He is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). It is not we that live, but Christ that lives in us (Galatians 2:20), and uses His own faith to deliver us from the power of Satan. What have we to do? – *Let Him* live in us in His own way. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” How can we let Him? – Simply by acknowledging Him; by confessing Him.

In this commentary on this week’s Lesson, we focus on Jesus’ sacrificing love. When Jesus hung upon the cross, the priests and scribes and elders said in mocking contempt, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save” (Matthew 27:42). And in these words there was a truth far beyond what the Jews had any thought of, – a truth that even professed followers of Jesus do not appreciate. Whoever grasps the full meaning of the statement, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save,” and who allows it to apply to himself, has salvation, for it contains the whole of the Gospel. “He saved others”; the Jews acknowledged this, yet they crucified Him. Jesus whose only offence was that “He went about doing good,” was hanged as a malefactor, and He lifted no hand in self-defence, nor uttered a word of reproach against His persecutors. “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus Christ saved others, and even while hanging on the cross, “a reproach of men, and despised of the people,” He showed His power to save others, in the case of the penitent thief; but Himself He could not save.

And this was the secret of His power to save others. It was not simply that He *would not* save Himself, – not alone that He unselfishly forgot Himself – but He *could not* save Himself. To have saved Himself would have been the destruction of all others; for if He had planned to save Himself, He would have stayed in heaven, and never exposed Himself to reproach and cruelty. But such a thing was impossible; He *could not* thus save Himself, for such a saving of self would have been selfishness, and there was no selfishness in Him. He absolutely could not remain in heaven and leave man to perish. But He could not save men, while keeping Himself in safety apart from them and their troubles. So “He gave Himself for us” (Titus 2:14). Thus we see that the Gospel has the origin and perfection in giving. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,” – not to be served, but to serve, – “and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). “For ye know that 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). He had everything, and we had nothing; so He gave up everything, and He kept nothing, in order that we might have everything.

Most clearly is this set forth in Philippians 2:7, but in the rendering of the Revised Version, where we are told that when Jesus had everything, He did not count it a thing to be desired to hold it, “but emptied Himself.” The Greek word from which this is translated has the sense of ‘to drain out.’ In a sense He annihilated Himself, threw Himself away, in order that He might save those who were lost, and in danger of annihilation. He took no thought for Himself; He did not defend Himself against attacks that were made upon Him; utterly regardless, reckless of self, He was lost in solicitude for others. This neglect of self was not a momentary enthusiasm, as when one under a strong impulse saves another from the impending death at the expense of his own life. On the contrary, it was a deliberate, settled purpose. Calmly and deliberately, looking over the whole situation, and counting the cost, He laid down His life, that is, He placed it from Him, gave it up to the service of others, and

when that was done, the moment of death was but an incident in a long career of the same giving. His life was just as truly laid down for the sheep before He came to earth, and while He walked and talked and suffered in Judea and Galilee, as when with His expiring breath He cried, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit" (Luke 23:46) and He died for us.

In all this history of self-sacrifice there is a lesson for us. We are not simply to admire the example of devotion, but to follow it. In it alone is there salvation. Jesus seemingly threw Himself away, yes, that is what He actually did, for He "poured out His soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12), "emptied Himself," drained the last drop; "wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). His humiliation was His exaltation; His casting away of self was His salvation. And that was the only possible way of salvation; for, as before stated, to have sought to have saved Himself would have been to deny Himself, that is, to prove false to His nature. Since God is love, unselfishness, the only way that He can preserve His own existence is to give Himself away.

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). "The brethren" for whom we are to give ourselves are the sons of Adam, for all who are children of Adam must be brethren. Of course those who give themselves for their brethren in Adam, will without question give themselves for their brethren in Christ, who Himself counts even those who do not know the name of God as His brethren, saying, "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren" (Hebrews 2:12). "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Let no one say or think, 'My life is so commonplace and uneventful that I have no occasion to lay down my life for anybody; no great opportunities come to me.' It is not in dying on some great occasion, that laying down one's life consists; the laying down of life consists in not counting it our own, reckoning ourselves as dead, deliberately putting our life from us, and forgetting all about it in thoughts of others. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." The lesson, in short, is that nobody can be saved by trying to be saved. Of truth, salvation is too great a thing to be accomplished by human efforts. Strange as it may seem, we can be saved only as we cease all efforts to save ourselves, and lose all thought of self in efforts to save others. Only so do we enter into full sympathy with Christ, and become labourers together with God. But that casting away of self is our salvation, for while we are concerning ourselves for others, Christ, who is also concerning Himself for others, is as a matter of course caring for us. "God turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10). How easy it is to cast all our care upon Him, when we know He cares for us! And when we know that He cares for us, what need have we to care for ourselves? The Lord's yoke is easy, and His burden light.

One more thing to consider about having Christ in us. The apostle Paul says, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians, both to the wise, and to the unwise" (Romans 1:14). That which was true of Paul, is equally true of us. Why was he debtor? Paul had received the whole of that which was given for the world. Christ gave His life for the world. He "tasted death for every man." But Christ is not divided; every soul gets the whole of Him. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7). His life is light; and a light that shines for me, shines equally bright for all. He is the "Sun of righteousness;" but the sun shines for all; each one gets all the benefit of the sun, and no one could get any more, even if he were the only person on earth. So each person gets the whole of the life of Christ, which is given to the world. Now it is very evident that if I get the whole of something that is given to all the world, that I am debtor to the world; and the same is true of every soul. The only difference between the most of us and the Apostle Paul is that he realised that to him was the fulness of Christ given, and he accepted and appropriated the gift, while we are too often content with but a little of the Divine life. We selfishly think to take just enough for our own use, and put a part away from us, not realising that we must have the whole; and so we fail to realise that we are debtors. May God grant that we all may have the eyes of our understanding enlightened by the Spirit of Christ, so that we may know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and may not reject that portion of the life of Christ which to the natural man seems disagreeable, but may allow His perfectly unselfish life to abide in us, so that we, not alone with our lips, but by the glad offering of ourselves for others, may truly render thanks unto God for His unspeakable gift.