

Sabbath School Lesson #9 – To Serve *and* to Save – 20-26 February 2021

Christ is not discouraged in His work. “Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench; He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth” (Isaiah 42:1-4). This is the work of Christ. What a world of comfort and encouragement there is in the statement of it, especially in the last verse. His work is to set judgment, or righteousness, in the earth. Righteousness can be set in the earth only by putting it into the hearts of men. Christ’s work is to take poor, weak, sinful men, and make righteous beings of them; to clothe them with the righteousness of God. Very poor material He has to work with, and no one knows this better than He. But He shall not fail nor be discouraged in this work. He knows how difficult the task is; but knowing man’s sinfulness and hardness of heart, He is not discouraged. Then what occasion is there for our being discouraged? If Christ is not discouraged with His task, need we be? Shall not we gather courage from His courage? We may be of good courage, for He has overcome the world, and in Him we shall do valiantly.

Sunday: Servant Nation – Christ is Israel, for the Father says to Him: “Thou art My Servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (Isaiah 49:3). Christ is the only saving servant. Nobody can be saved, except in Christ, and all who are in Christ are Abraham’s seed, “and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). Therefore all who are in Christ are Israel, and none others are. But since Christ is Israel, and Christ is the Banner that is lifted up to the people, it follows that Israel is the ensign to the nations, the banner round which all people are called to rally. From every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people will men come, and form part of the nation of Israel, and that which will attract them will be the indwelling Christ glorifying His people. He is near to all who call upon Him. Yea, He is near to all, waiting to be called by them. He has not forsaken any man, but has come seeking them, and all who will but turn to Him, instead of running away from Him, will find abundance of pardon, and, being pardoned, they will be enrolled as members of the kingdom of Israel. Not only so, but they will be reckoned as princes, even kings, and priests; for the kingdom of David, over which Christ rules, counts among its subjects none of lower rank than king.

Monday: Unnamed Individual Servant – This servant is Christ. Peter talks of Christ as who “suffered ... being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6). To the “spirits in prison”? Now disobedience brings condemnation to death (Romans 6:23), and a man under sentence of death is always kept in prison. This is the idea conveyed by the psalmist when he says: “From Heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoners; to loose those that are appointed to death” (Psalms 102:19-20). And the idea is still more forcibly expressed by the apostle, when he says that Christ took part of flesh and blood, “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them, who *through fear of death* were all their lifetime *subject to bondage*” (Hebrews 2:14-15). Nothing but sin causes fear of death; hence the text teaches emphatically that sin makes men “subject to bondage.” It is the especial mission of Christ to save people from sin (Matthew 1:21), and consequently to release them from prison. Turning to Isaiah, we read:

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them

that sit in darkness out of the prison house” (Isaiah 42:1-7). “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1). Notice that Christ proclaims the opening of the prison to them that are bound, and brings out the prisoners from the prison, because the Spirit is upon Him. This agrees with Peter’s statement that Christ, by the Spirit, went and preached to the spirits in prison. By the same Spirit, Christ went in the days of Noah, and through Him, preached unto the antediluvians, who were in the bondage of sin; and that in so doing He was doing what He is doing to-day, and has been doing ever since the fall.

Tuesday: Persian “Messiah” – The heathen king Cyrus was named more than a hundred years before he was born, and his part in the work of God was laid out for him (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-4). One hundred and thirteen years before Cyrus was born, Isaiah called him by name, and said, one hundred and seventy-six years before it came to pass, that he should let the people of Israel go from captivity. But Babylon was to fall before Israel could go free; and the prophet also said that Cyrus should take that mighty city (Isaiah 45:1-5). It came to pass, when Cyrus reigned, he fulfilled the work of saving the Jews, for king Cyrus “made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the Lord God of Heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (*He is the God*)” (Ezra 1:2).

Wednesday: Hope in Advance – God gives His people hope in advance. He knew us by name before we existed. He called Cyrus before he was born. Isaiah 45:1-4: “Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron; and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel Mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name; I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known Me.” This is a prophecy of the taking of Babylon by the Medo-Persian armies under the leadership of Cyrus and Darius. It was uttered about 712 years BC, and the event which it foretells took place about 538 BC and thus king Cyrus, nearly 150 years before he was born, was called by name and “surnamed” by the God of heaven, for the sake of Israel His people, who were yet to pass another sixty years in Babylonish captivity. And surely God gives hope in advance and appoints those whom He uses as instruments of their welfare.

Thursday: A Feeling and Suffering Servant – Now we will read Isaiah 49:6-9: “It is a light thing that thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the ends of the earth. Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and He shall choose thee. Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves.” There can be no question but that these words apply primarily to Christ; but He is “the Son of man,” and came to earth in man’s stead in order that we might be ambassadors in His stead. That these words refer to men whom the Lord calls, equally with Christ, may be seen by comparing verse 6 with Acts 13:46-47, where we read that Paul and Barnabas said, “We turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.” The apostles applied the words to themselves as naturally as though they themselves had been named in the prophecy. This shows that whatever work that the Father gave to His Son to do in this earth, is given to everyone who will accept His call.