

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – The Birdcage – 9-15 July 2022

Christ seeks to teach us to sing the praises of God even amid trials. Peter, speaks to those “who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time,” and who are in heaviness through manifold temptation, and yet are rejoicing in hope, that the trial of their faith “being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire,” will be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Christ (1 Peter 1:5-7). “In the full light of day, and in hearing of the music of other voices, the caged bird will not sing the song that his master seeks to teach him” {MH 472.2}. Thus, it is with us, we cannot learn with other voices, we need only the voice of God.

Sunday: To the Promised Land via a Dead End – In Exodus 14, why did God bring the Israelites to a place where He knew they would be terrified? (1) It was God that was leading the people. “And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines.” Moses no more knew what to do, or which way to go, than the people did, only as the Lord told him. God could tell Moses, because “Moses was faithful in all His house.” (2) At the first sight of danger the faith of the people oozed away. They forgot what God had already done for them, and how powerfully He had wrought for their deliverance. The last judgment upon the Egyptians should have been sufficient of itself to teach them to trust in the Lord, and that He was abundantly able to save them from those of the Egyptians who yet remained alive. (3) God did not design that the people should do any fighting. He led them through the wilderness, in order that they might not see war. Yet He knew that if they went the way that they did, the Egyptians would surely pursue them. The children of Israel never had any greater need of fighting than they did when the Egyptians closed in on them by the Red Sea; yet the word then was, “The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” It may be said that the reason why the Lord did not wish them to see war was because they were as yet unprepared for fighting; but we must remember that on other occasions when they had many trained warriors, God often delivered them without their striking a blow. When we consider the circumstances of their deliverance from Egypt – how it was all accomplished by the direct power of God, their part being only to follow and obey His word – we must be convinced that it was not according to the plan of God that they should do any fighting, even in self-defence. (4) We are also to learn that the shortest and the apparently easiest way is not always the best way. The route through the land of the Philistines was the shortest, but it was not the best one for the Israelites to take. The fact that we get into difficult places, where we cannot see our way out, is no evidence that God has not been leading us. God led the children of Israel into that narrow place in the wilderness, between the mountains and the sea, just as surely as He led them out of Egypt. He knew that they could not help themselves in such a trap, and He led them there deliberately, in order that they might see as never before that it was God who was responsible for their safety, that He was fully able to discharge the task which He had undertaken. Their trouble was designed to give them an ineffaceable lesson of trust in God.

Monday: Bitter Waters – In Exodus 17:7, what lessons do we learn? Water gushed forth from the smitten rock. Christ stood upon the rock, but they did not see Him; but they could have seen Him by faith. Notice, the water was given as a direct answer to the unbelieving question, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” By supplying them with water out of the solid, flinty rock in the dry and barren desert, the Lord showed the people that He was really among them; for none but He could have done it. But it was not simply as a guest that He was among them. He was their life, and this miracle was designed to teach them that fact. They knew that water was their sole hope of life, and they could not help seeing that the water which revived them came directly from the Lord. Therefore those who stopped to think must have seen that He was their life and their support. Whether they knew it or not, they were drinking directly from Christ, that is, receiving of His life. With Him is “the fountain of life” (Psalm 36:9). If they did not recognise the Lord in His gracious gift, then the water was no more to them than it was to their cattle. “Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:20). But when the people with their superior abilities did not recognise God in His gifts any more than their cattle did, they showed themselves even

less discerning than the cattle. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider” (Isaiah 1:3). In view of the miracle of the water from the Rock, the Lord Himself, – we can better understand the force of His words when He afterward thus expressed the greatness of their sin in departing from Him: “Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:12-13). The water which came from the Rock, was Christ’s own life. If they had recognised the source whence it came, they would have been drinking in righteousness, and would have been blessed with righteousness; for it is written, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Thus, if we thirst for righteousness, and are filled, it is only by drinking in the righteousness for which we thirst.

Tuesday: The Great Controversy in the Desert – In Matthew 4, what lessons can you learn from this account about how to overcome temptation and not give in to sin? Back in Eden, what did the devil set himself in that case? – against the Word of God. If our first parents had been loyal to the Word of God, just as God Himself gave it, they would never have fallen into the power of the devil. In Matthew 4, when Christ came into the world, the second Adam, the devil tried to make Him fall also, and he tried Him on the very point where he succeeded with the first Adam. Jesus was weak with long fasting, when the tempter came to Him and said, “If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” The devil sought to induce the Lord to swerve from the Word of God. The devil cared for nothing else but to get Jesus to deviate just a little from the written Word; and Jesus resisted the temptations and gained the victory only by His strict loyalty to that written Word. He met every temptation with “It is written.”

Wednesday: An Enduring Legacy – In 1 Peter 1:6-9, how can we have joy amid trials? We are not to make ourselves glad. We have not to force gladness; nor to simulate it. If joy is not spontaneous, it is not joy. In the world gladness is often fictitious; it is either the result of passing events, and so but momentary, or it is put on to cover up real unhappiness. That is the way the world gives peace and joy. But Christ gives not as the world gives. He gives joy that cannot be affected by surroundings. Jesus Christ was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” and He says that His disciples shall have tribulation in the world: yet He was a man of joy, for He said, “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11). And even when saying that tribulation must come, He says, “Be of good cheer” (John 16:33). Joy that is unaffected by tribulation and affliction is worth having. Among false libels against Christ, is the statement that He never smiled. As if a man of long visage and doleful countenance could ever attract children to him! No; “the joy that was set before Him” enabled Him to endure the cross (Hebrews 12:3). He had God always before His face, in whose presence there is “fulness of joy;” and because He was “full of joy” from the countenance of the Father, our joy can be full in Him. God’s countenance is full of joy (compare Psalm 16, Acts 2:25-28; and John 15:11). Because of His anointing by the Spirit, He gives us “the oil of joy for mourning” (Isaiah 61:1, 3), so that although we may be “in heaviness through manifold temptations,” yet, believing in Jesus Christ, we are able to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:5-8).

Thursday: Trial by Fire – “Our work — have we so done it that it will bear the inspection of the Master, who has given to every man work according to his several ability? Will it be consumed as hay, wood, and stubble, unworthy of preservation? or will it stand the trial by fire?” {RH Dec 16, 1884, par. 1}. “Is our earthly, temporal work done with a thoroughness, a fidelity, that will bear scrutiny? Are there those whom we have wronged who will testify against us in the day of God? If so, the record has passed up to heaven, and we shall meet it again. We are to work for the great Task-master’s eye, whether our pains taking efforts are seen and appreciated by men or not. No man, woman, nor child can acceptably serve God with neglectful, hap-hazard, sham work, whether it be secular or religious service. The true Christian will have an eye single to the glory of God in all things, encouraging his purposes and strengthening his principles with this thought, “I do this for Christ.” (*ibid*, 1884, par. 2).