

Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Rewards of Faithfulness – 18-24 March 2023

Christ would have us understand the rewards of faithfulness. In the parable to this effect, He concludes: “His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21). None will get the reward because they have lived up to the highest ideal of Christianity. We must reach for the reality. Christ is reality. Everything real is but a manifestation of Christ’s fulness. “It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.” Whatever does not come from Him, – whatever is not the outgrowth of His life, even though it be man’s highest ideal, – is but emptiness and unreality. Having Him, we have everything, and without Him we have nothing, and are nothing.

Sunday: Reward for Faithfulness – How do we understand the difference between salvation by grace and a reward according to works? “The one thing essential for us in order that we may receive and impart the forgiving love of God is to know and believe the love that He has to us.... Forgiveness, reconciliation with God, comes to us, not as a reward for our works, it is not bestowed because of the merit of sinful men, but it is a gift unto us, having in the spotless righteousness of Christ its foundation for bestowal” {MB 115.1}. Oh sing: “How deep the Father’s love for us; How vast beyond all measure; That He should give His only Son; To make a wretch His treasure; How great the pain of searing loss; The Father turns His face away; As wounds which mar the Chosen One; Bring many sons to glory.” Let not your motivation for serving God be mere reward for faithfulness. When we grow up in Christ, we acquire a new self-forgetful motivation: a concern for Jesus, that we honour Him, that the burden of sorrow He feels for the world may be lifted, that “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11). All egocentric motivation based on fear of hell or hope of reward is Old Covenant in nature and is less effective. The higher motivation is symbolised in the climax of Scripture – the Bride of Christ making herself “ready” for the “marriage of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:7). But this climax is apparently delayed because the bride is not allowing Christ to make her “ready” yet. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). In other words, an appreciation of agape of Christ delivers us from egocentric motivation. The worthiness of Christ, the lamb that was slain, is the motivation for a Christian. “Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12). Why must I bring shame and grief to my worthy Saviour?

Monday: Everlasting Life – How do we get everlasting life/immortality? “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:11-12). God the Father is the supreme source of all life in the universe. That God is the fountain and source of immortality is plain from the statement of Paul. He speaks thus of God the Father: “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see; to whom be honour and power everlasting; Amen” (1 Timothy 6:16). This text is designed to teach that the self-existent God is the only One, of Himself, possesses this wonderful nature. When Christ proceeded out of His Father (Proverbs 8:22-25; see PP 34.1), the Father ordained Christ should have the same life original that is in God His Father: “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. ‘He that hath the Son hath life.’ 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life” {DA 530.3}. It is clear in the Bible the source of the “life, original, unborrowed, underived” that is in Christ: “For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5:26). In other words, the Father has immortality (“life, original, unborrowed, underived”) in Himself; and the Father in turn has given that same life to His Son. This life, “immortality, the life which is exclusively the property of God” {1SM 296.2}, Christ has in Himself by inheritance (Hebrews 1:4) from His Father who possessed and brought Him forth (Proverbs 8:22-25; John 8:42). Adventists who believe in the trinity deny the literal Sonship of Christ, they have “another Jesus” (2 Corinthians 11:4) and have a false hope of life, for God has put that life

only in His literal Son, and he who has no true Son has no life. By stressing that only those who have the Son have eternal life (1 John 5:11-12), John disproves the trinity doctrine that teach that the Sonship of Christ is metaphorical, for otherwise life is metaphorical as well. If you deny Christ is literal Son of God, saying 'Father and Son' are role titles (as in Adventist Review, 31 Oct 1996), "He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22)!

Tuesday: The New Jerusalem – How are we to understand the New Jerusalem as "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Revelation 21:9-10; GC 426.2) and Christians as the bride of Christ? Saints, and by extension, their city, is the bride. From the beginning, God has considered Himself as occupying the close relation of husband to His people. Read the prophecies of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the whole of Hosea. The third chapter of Jeremiah is especially plain. "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you" (verse 14). And then the Lord tells what He will do if they will return, using words that can apply only to the redeemed state. God says, speaking of the making of the new covenant, that His people broke the old covenant, "although I was an husband unto them" (Jeremiah 31:32). So, turning to the New Testament, we read that we are to be married to Him that is raised from the dead, that we may bring forth fruit unto God (Romans 7:4); Paul writes, "I have espoused you to one husband, and I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2); and in the fifth chapter of Ephesians we read that the same close relation exists between Christ and His people that exists between a man and his wife (see verses 22-32). So by a change in the symbol, or an enlargement of it, the city of God, Jerusalem, is considered as married to Christ. The very land itself where God's people dwell, is married to Him. This is perfectly in harmony with the fact that Christ, who is "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29), is also "the everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6). Paul says, "Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Galatians 4:26); and since it is Christ alone that gives freedom (Romans 8:1; John 8:33-36), the New Jerusalem is very properly called the mother of all those who are saved from sin. Isaiah 54 presents Jerusalem as a wife forsaken by her husband, but comforted that she still owned by her husband, and will be honoured by Him. The time when these promises will be fulfilled is set forth in Revelation 21; Zechariah 14:1- 11; Isaiah 49:13-23, all of which should be read in connection with the Lamb's wife.

Wednesday: The Settling of Accounts – In Matthew 25:20–23, what does God say to those who were faithful money managers in supporting His cause, and what does it mean to "enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:23)? The day is far spent. Christ will soon call us to account for how we have spent the wealth He gave us. Ask yourself this: Am I doing all I can in the vineyard of the Lord? Is my time and talent occupied in His service? Is my all upon the altar? Am I ready to give my account to the Lord of all and hear the blessed applause, Well done, thou good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?

Thursday: Eyes on the Prize – What does it mean to keep your eyes on the prize, what is the prize? I have seen the tender love that God has for his people, and that it is very great. I saw an angel over every saint, with their wings spread about them: and if the saints wept through discouragement, or were in danger, the angel that ever attended them would fly quickly upward to carry the tidings, and the angels in the City would cease to sing. Then Jesus would commission another angel to descend to encourage, watch over and try to keep them from going out of the narrow path: but, if they did not take heed to the watchful care of these angels, and would not be comforted by them, and continued to go astray, the angels would look sad and weep. Then they would bear the tidings upward, and all the angels in the City would weep, and then with a loud voice say, Amen. But if the saints fixed their eyes on the prize before them, and glorified God by praising him, then the angels would bear the glad tidings to the City, and the angels in the city would touch their golden harps and sing with a loud voice — Alleluia! and the heavenly arches would ring with lovely songs. I will here state, that there is perfect order and harmony in the holy City" {PT August 1, 1849, par. 16}. "All the angels that are commissioned to visit the earth, hold a golden card which they present to the angels at the gates of the City, as they pass in and out. Heaven is a good place. I long to be there, and behold my lovely Jesus, who gave his life for me, and be changed into his glorious image. Oh! for language to express the glory of the bright world to come. I thirst for the living streams that make glad the City of our God" {ibid, 1849, par. 17}.