

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – Excuses to Avoid Mission – 28 Oct-3 November 2023

Christ tells us plainly, “without Me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). It follows, without Christ living us, we cannot truly do mission. Paul was able to do mission because Christ was in him. “When it pleased God ... to reveal His Son in me” (Galatians 1:15-16); note the exact words – the apostle does not say that it pleased God to reveal His Son to him but in him. How was Christ in Paul to enable him do mission? The Spirit of Christ was in Paul, for God who called Paul also “sent forth the Spirit of His Son into” (Galatians 4:6) the heart of Paul, so he could say “Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). Unless Christ is us, we cannot truly do mission. In this context, we read the memory text: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me” (Isaiah 6:8). Like Paul, Isaiah had Christ in him to do mission. How do we know? Peter says that the prophets “prophesied of the grace that should come onto you; searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Peter 1:10-11). If like the prophets of old, “the Spirit of Christ” be in us, we will make no excuses to avoid mission.

Sunday: Our Excuses: Fear – What fear is lacking in those who fear to do mission? It is the fear of God. “Fear God” (Revelation 14:7). There is no room for any other fears where this great fear is; it disturbs not. The fear of God turns all other fears out of the mind. As the fear of God is greater, it brings as great peace as the other fears brings trouble in the mind. “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (Psalm 119:165). Now, let us turn to the story of Jonah who was sent on a mission to Nineveh. The Lesson writer says, ‘One of the reasons Jonah may have been unwilling to go to Nineveh was fear.’ This is contrary to Jonah’s testimony, for Jonah testified to the Lord the reason he run away: “I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (Jonah 4:2). The Lesson writer quotes EG White to say that, “Nineveh was a center of crime and wickedness” {PK 265.2}, then the Lesson writer makes another assertion: ‘Indeed, at the thought of walking among the masses of people in Nineveh, Jonah must have quaked with fear.’ But this assertion is not supported by EG White. Further reading from the same book by EG White is contrary to the Lesson writer’s assertion suggesting that Jonah was fleeing because of fear of crime in Nineveh. “When Jonah learned of God’s purpose to spare the city that, notwithstanding its wickedness, had been led to repent in sackcloth and ashes, he should have been the first to rejoice because of God’s amazing grace; but instead he allowed his mind to dwell upon the possibility of his being regarded as a false prophet. Jealous of his reputation, he lost sight of the infinitely greater value of the souls in that wretched city. The compassion shown by God toward the repentant Ninevites “displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry.” “Was not this my saying,” he inquired of the Lord, “when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil.” Jonah 4:1, 2.” {PK 271.1}.

Monday: Our Excuses: False Views – Was Jonah avoiding mission to Nineveh because of his supposedly ‘false views’ of God? The Lesson writer says, ‘While various gods, they believed, ruled in their various lands, the sea was deemed the chaotic realm of demons. In the worldview of the mariners, sacrifice was needed to appease their wrath. Although Jonah was a Hebrew, he quite possibly had a worldview that was influenced by the traditional beliefs of his times.’ The Bible gives us no evidence that Jonah had such false views. Read carefully Jonah 12. “So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not.” Then they cast lots to find whose was the fault that the storm was upon them, and the lot fell upon Jonah. “Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us. What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people art thou? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of Heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid.” Contrary to Jonah having false views, he knew that it is God who rules supreme both on land and sea. The mariners knew that the God who made the sea and the dry land must

be above all gods, and so when they heard of Him from the testimony of Jonah, they were “exceedingly afraid.” Then, knowing that Jonah was the cause of all their trouble, “they said unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea grew more and more tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; ... for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.” This does not suggest at all that Jonah believed in appeasing the gods of the sea, for Jonah was Hebrew who knew God is not appeased as gods. “Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not.” Even against the evidence of the lot, and the convincing word of Jonah, the men laboured hard to deliver themselves rather than pitch him into the sea; but it was all no use; overboard he had to go. So the men “cried unto the Lord.... Lay not upon us innocent blood.” “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea; and the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows.” So the Lord turned Jonah’s rebellion into good for those who knew not the Lord, and taught them of Himself. But Jonah was not avoiding mission due to false views.

Tuesday: Our Excuses: Inconvenience – Was it convenient for Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh; what was the inconvenience, if so, about for Jonah? It was not inconvenience per se with Jonah, but was about his lack of appreciation for mission. The first time Jonah is sent, the Lord tells him, “arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:2). Jonah attempted to run away from the Lord, for he “rose up to flee unto Tarshish” (verse 3). The fleeing Jonah found himself in “the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (verse 17) and “Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish’s belly” and he acknowledged that “Salvation is of the LORD” (Jonah 2:1, 9). “And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land” (verse 10). After that, Jonah was ready for mission. The second time Jonah is sent, the Lord tells him, “arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee” (Jonah 3:2). No more fleeing this time, he “arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD” (verse 3). Jonah went to Nineveh, preaching, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (verse 4). Jonah verily preached a warning message! In response, “the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them” (verse 5). “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not” (verse 10). Although Jonah preached, as we will see in the next section, he still was jealous of his reputation and had lost true missionary spirit.

Wednesday: Our Excuses: Uncomfortable Confrontations – What was wrong with Jonah? Jonah had lost sight of the mission purpose. The blessing of the gospel preached to Abraham (Genesis 12), given to Israel, was for the whole world, even Nineveh. Jealous of his reputation, Jonah had lost sight of the mission. Thus, Jonah revealed a flawed mindset in uncomfortable confrontation with the Lord: “I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (Jonah 4:2). But Jonah is not alone in history of the Jews to have lost sight of the mission to bring gospel blessings to the entire world. It was not until Peter was commanded to go to Caesarea to preach the gospel to the Gentiles that he learnt this, and he exclaimed, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10: 34-35). This was the first time that Peter had ever perceived that truth, but it was not the first time that this thing was true. It had been a truth as long as God had existed. God never chose anybody to the exclusion of anybody else. The wisdom that comes from above is “without partiality” (James 3:17). In saving Nineveh, God taught Jonah the gospel blessings were for the entire world.

Thursday: Here Am I, Send Me – Isaiah heard a voice saying, “Who will go?” What will your response be? We would go and be effective after we are converted. Both Peter and Isaiah were effective after conversion. To Peter, the Lord said, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (John 5:10); “thou shalt be catching men alive.” But Peter had to be converted before he could strengthen the brethren (Luke 22:31-32); and likewise the coal from off the altar had to touch the lips of Isaiah, purge his sin, before he could say, “Here am I, send me,” to the call, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” and could be told, “Go.”