

## Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Mission to the Powerful – 25 Nov-1 Dec 2023

**C**hrist says: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

**Sunday: Nebuchadnezzar** – Read Daniel 4. What happened to the king here, and what does this tell us about salvation coming to one of the world’s most powerful men? In the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar we find a fitting illustration of the basic principles and issues involved in every person’s conversion. We see ourselves in Nebuchadnezzar as self-exalted, self-reliant, self-deceived sinners. Nebuchadnezzar felt no need of God. He haughtily indulged in the thought that he himself was the source of his successes in life. He needed to be awakened to the greater reality of God’s sovereignty. So do we. We see that the circumstances of divine providence humbled the king, and he fully acknowledged God.

**Monday: Naaman** – Read 2 Kings 5:1–19. What do we learn from this story? Naaman had the plan by which the Lord was to heal him all laid out in his own mind, and because the Lord did not purpose to manifest His power in that way, he first went away in a rage. And so it is with people today. “Are not Abana and Pharpar,” said Naaman, “rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean?” (verse 12). He first trusted his ways than the Lord’s way! And so do we trust our ways than God’s way. God says, “neither are your ways my ways,” “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways” (Isaiah 55:8-9). But in the end, Naaman accepted God’s way.

**Tuesday: Witnessing to the Learned: Nicodemus** – Read John 3. What did Jesus teach Nicodemus and want us to learn? After the resurrection of Christ, Nicodemus became a strong follower of Christ and financed the gospel with all his wealth. Christ had taught Nicodemus lessons that he would later fully understand. One of the lessons Nicodemus was taught was how Christ would continue to be here on earth at the same time in heaven. Christ would bodily be in heaven as our high priest and at the same time be with us on earth by His own Spirit. Christ taught Nicodemus how He would be omnipresent, and we examine that lesson here. The text is John 3:12-13 “If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.”

Christ is speaking here, and He is addressing Nicodemus as one standing right before Him – in His immediate presence. These were not words spoken through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – as were many of the other words written by the disciples. These words were a direct report of the words spoken to Nicodemus by Christ – we are told: “Nicodemus related to John the story of that interview, and by his pen it was recorded for the instruction of millions. The truths there taught are as important today as they were on that solemn night in the shadowy mountain, when the Jewish ruler came to learn the way of life from the lowly Teacher of Galilee” (Ellen White, DA 177.2). Christ revealed to Nicodemus his need to be “born again” in order to “see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Christ said to Nicodemus, “The Christian’s life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit” (DA 172.1). “Nicodemus was still perplexed, and Jesus used the wind to illustrate His meaning: ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit’” (DA 172.2). Christ continued to explain to Nicodemus that conversion of the soul is “by an agency as unseen as the wind,” that is, by “the Spirit” (DA 172.3). In other words, Jesus was talking to Nicodemus about the Holy Spirit and his need to be re-born from above. Christ was trying to get Nicodemus to discern “heavenly things” (John 3:12). Christ was trying to get him to go beyond his earthly wisdom and understanding and to focus on that which is from above, that is, on spiritual truths which “are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Christ had used “earthly things” (John 3:12) to illustrate the spiritual things He was relating to, and while Nicodemus seemed eager to understand that which he was being taught, he had much difficulties grasping the lesson.

Christ then told Nicodemus: “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12). By this time Christ had only given

Nicodemus “milk,” but knowing he ought to get off “milk” and eat “meat,” Christ gave Nicodemus the “meat” as follows: “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). It is not difficult to understand the first part of John 3:13 – that the one who came down from heaven and who has ascended up to heaven is the ‘Son of man’ – Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. But the second part of this verse – “which is in heaven” – needs discernment. How could Christ speaking these words to Nicodemus, and who was physically present with him at that moment, say that He is also in heaven?! The tense that is used in John 3:13 in the word translated as “which is” (in heaven) is the first-person singular present indicative – this means that the word “is” is indicative of the state of the person speaking, at that moment – it indicates where the person speaking “is” right then. Christ was saying, in effect, “although I am standing here speaking to you right now” – “I am in heaven.” That needs discernment. Especially if you understand that the Son of God, who at His earthly birth became “the Son of man”, was at the time of speaking to Nicodemus constrained by humanity, for we are told: “Cumbered with humanity Christ could not be in every place personally” (DA 669.2). How then, could Christ be present and speaking with Nicodemus here on this earth and be in heaven at the same time? The only way Christ could have been in heaven at the same time on earth with Nicodemus was being in heaven by His Spirit and being on earth bodily. This is the lesson Christ sought to teach Nicodemus, that when Christ ascends to heaven, He would be bodily performing His priestly work in heaven while by His own Spirit He would be working here on earth. The essence of the lesson to Nicodemus was this: Christ was ministering to Nicodemus bodily on earth while He was in heaven spiritually, and the reverse would be true after Christ went to heaven bodily. This is why Christ later told His disciples (John 16:7): “Christ said, ‘It is expedient for you that I go away.’ No one could then have any preference because of his location or personal contact with Christ. The Saviour would be accessible to all alike, spiritually, and in this sense he would be nearer to us all than if he had not ascended on high. Now all may be equally favored by beholding Him and reflecting His character. The eye of faith sees Him ever present, in all His goodness, grace, forbearance, courtesy, and love” – EG White {RH Jan 2, 1913, par 6}.

The lesson Christ taught Nicodemus helps us to understand why the apostles believed that the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of Christ which was in” the prophets (1 Peter 1:11), and “the Lord is that Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17); and helps us understand why Ellen White believed the Holy Spirit in John 14:16-17 “refers to the omnipresence of the Spirit of Christ, called the Comforter” {14MR 179.3}; “the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, which is sent to all men to give them sufficiency, that through His grace we might be complete in Him” {14MR 84.3}; that “the Holy Spirit is the breath of spiritual life in the soul. The impartation of the Spirit is the impartation of the life of Christ. It imbues the receiver with the attributes of Christ” {DA 805.3}; “We want the Holy Spirit, which is Jesus Christ” {Lt66-1894 (April 10, 1894) par. 18}.

**Wednesday: Mission to the Rich** – What testimonies were given by Ellen White to leading men who were not doing as did Zacchaeus? To General Conference president, Elder Daniels, who had invested in stocks and led others to do the same, as today ministers invest in stocks, coffee or tea and lead others to do the same, it was asked: “Have you felt that you must confess your sin in diverting to city lands and mining stocks the means which should have been invested in the cause of God? You and your brethren who were engaged with you have a work of restitution to do. When you, Elder Daniels, can say, with Zacchaeus, that if you have received aught of any man unjustly you will restore to him fourfold, then there will be evidence of a genuine work of the Spirit of God in your heart” {PH096 71.2}.

**Thursday: Mission to the Powerful** – In Matthew 27:57-60, what work did Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea do? “In that time of discouragement and danger, when the hearts of the disciples were failing them through doubt and fear, Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, came forward and obtained the Lord's body from Pilate, and Nicodemus, who at the first came to Jesus by night, brought a hundred pounds' weight of myrrh and aloes. These two men with their own hands performed the last sacred rites, and laid the body of the Saviour in a new sepulchre where never man lay before. These lofty rulers of the Jews mingled their tears together over the sacred form of the dead” EG White {2SP 135.1}.