

Sabbath School Lesson #11 – Mission to the Unreached: Part 2 – 9-15 Dec 2023

Christ would have us learn the lesson he taught His disciples in Matthew 15 when He healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman. In learning the lesson, let us remember that the Jews regarded the Canaanites with the utmost contempt, and that even the disciples had not wholly cast aside this wicked prejudice. They had not yet comprehended the fact that “the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14). The woman knew that Jesus was a Jew and recognised Him as one, in addressing Him as a “son of David,” and she well knew how the Jews regarded her nation, but she had heard of the compassion shown by Jesus to those who were in trouble, and resting her hope upon His character rather than upon His nationality, she presented her case to Him, saying, “Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David; for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” She well knew that she had nothing in herself upon which to base a claim for help, for was she not “a woman of Canaan” (Matthew 15:22)? From the standpoint of the Jews, here was a double reason for answering her “not a word;” for on another occasion even the disciples “marvelled that He was speaking with a woman” (John 4:27), and she was not simply “a woman,” but she was “a woman of Canaan.” But her plea for help was not put upon the ground of her worthiness but of her need. Seeing that Jesus made no immediate response to her request, the disciples gave expression to their feelings of prejudice and said, “Send her away.” This openly declared attitude of the disciples toward the woman and her request gave force to the very lesson which Jesus intended to teach them by His own answer to her cry for help. How would they be ready to go “into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), if they were not taught, by an almost extreme example as well as by precept, that “there is no difference” (Romans 10:12)? And yet the reply of Jesus to them would seem, as interpreted by them, to strengthen their position: “I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24). Yes, so they thought; and so, why therefore should He not send away this “woman of Canaan”? They were yet to learn that “they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed” (Romans 9:8). The Scriptures were full of this teaching: “In that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentile seek” (Isaiah 11:10). “Behold My Servant, whom I uphold: Mine elect, in whom the My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 41:1). “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations” (Psalm 67:1-2). But the plainest scriptures, when read in the light of a prejudice, are not permitted to convey the truth to the heart. In reply to the woman's second petition, “Lord, help me,” Jesus made His first direct reply to her urgent entreaty: “It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs.” The woman's answer gained her request: “And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.” The feelings of the disciples have been expressed, so that the contrast between their attitude and His may sharply appear, and the faith of the woman has stood the test put upon it. “Then Jesus answered and said under her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Matthew 15:28). Thus did Jesus show that every needy was one of the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Sunday: Mission to Regions Beyond – Is mission to regions beyond confined to the cities? The cities are where most people live, but regions beyond include rural lands that are unreached. “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” is the original gospel commission; and the last message is to every “nation, kindred, tongue, and people.” Cities and places which have not yet been entered, are only “regions beyond.” But many today, like Jonah who was sent to the city, find excuses not to go to the cities. Like Jonah, we may attempt to run away, but the word of the Lord still tells us: ‘arise, go unto that city, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.’ Sending Paul to the wicked city of Corinth, the Lord said, “be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10). With most of the world's population living today in the cities, the Lord calls

us to preach the warning message to the cities. But how, must we, Seventh-day Adventists, live in these wicked cities in order to preach? “The cities are to be worked from outposts. Said the messenger of God, ‘Shall not the cities be warned? Yes; not by God’s people living in them, but by their visiting them, to warn them of what is coming upon the earth’” {CL 30.2}.

Monday: Seeking the Multitudes – What is the obstacle to seeking the multitudes in our time? Jesus said to his disciples, on one occasion, “Truly the harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few” (Matthew 9:37). This suggests the query, Who are the laborers? and how do they stand related to the work of Christ? Their relation to Christ is most intimate. Christ is the great source of light. His disciples derive the light from him, and are, in turn, to be the light of the world (see Matthew 5:14). Thus they are sharers in Christ’s work. He himself said to the Father: “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:18). Thus, the disciples become “workers together with God” (2 Cor 6:1), prepared, by the only means possible, to receive these words, “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt 25:23). Only those who are sharers in Christ’s work can be partakers of his joy.

Tuesday: In Tyre and Sidon – How much work was done in Tyre and Sidon and was it enough? “Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you” (Matthew 9:20-22). Sad that, the parts of the earth where the greatest light of the Gospel shown in past ages, are now the most benighted. If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matt 6:23). A question can be asked, why were there not mighty works done in Tyre and Sidon, why were they not given a chance as Chorazin, and Bethsaida? This can be answered only by reading why Jesus did not perform many miracles in Nazareth: “And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt 13:58). God leaves no one to perish through any fault of His. All that can be done, He does for all. He has not left Himself without witness in any nation (see Acts 14:16-17). To everyone is given enough light to enable him to be saved. In some places it is possible to do more work than in others; yet the seemingly less favoured places cannot complain that they are discriminated against, since they do not appreciate and use the light they have. They have only themselves to blame if the mighty works that would be convincing are not done in them, because their own unbelief has shut those works out. The man who refuses instruction is as culpable as one who receives it and turns it away.

Wednesday: “Send Her Away!” – What lesson do we learn from the fact that Jesus did not “send her away” as His disciples had requested? The blessing of the gospel preached to Abraham (Genesis 12), given to Israel, was for the whole world. It is a sad fact that the Jews did not accept the high commission given them and did not proceed to evangelise the world. Once in the land of Canaan, they assumed that what the Lord had done for them was because He thought more of them than of any other people in the world, and so they began to trust in themselves that they were righteous and despise others. This spirit was shown in the case of Jonah, which also shows God’s care for other people besides the Israelites. How strange it is that with the case of Jonah before them, the disciples of Jesus still thought the Lord had no care for “a woman of Canaan” (Matthew 15:22)! The disciples had asked Jesus to send her away. The fact that Jesus granted her request should have taught the disciples that He was not exclusive in His work. But the disciples were slow to the lesson. It was not until Peter was commanded to go to Caesarea to preach to 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).

Thursday: Faith on Earth? – How shall we Seventh-day Adventists answer the question asked by our Lord: When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on earth? It is a sad picture reading what the Lord says: “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. ... they were eating and drinking ... knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:37-39); and this: “Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; ... the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire ... thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:28-30).