

Sabbath School Lesson #4 – Witnesses of Christ as the Messiah – 19-25 October 2024

Christ told Nicodemus how to enter into the kingdom of God. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Except a man be born of the Spirit before he dies, he will never see the resurrection unto life (Romans 8:11) to enter heaven. It is certain, therefore, except the Spirit of Christ dwells in us, we cannot be raised from the dead to life.

Sunday: The Testimony of John the Baptist – Read John 1:19-23; 3:30. How did John describe his mission? In preparation leading up to Pentecost, the message of repentance and sharp rebuke of sin was borne by John, who was the lesser light, leading to Jesus, the greater light. John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). “The prophet John was the connecting link between the two dispensations. As God’s representative he stood forth to show the relation of the law and the prophets to the Christian dispensation. He was the lesser light, which was to be followed by a greater” {DA 220.2}. As John, “a greater prophet” (Luke 7:28), was a lesser light, each prophet in the Bible, and the Bible itself, is the lesser light leading to Jesus, the greater light, for all scriptures testify of Jesus (John 5:39).

Monday: The Lamb of God – Read John 1:29-37. How does the proclamation of John that Christ is the lamb of God release us from the bondage of sin? When the blood of Christ was shed on the cross, all could then see that He is “the Lamb of God that taketh away sin,” then faith is revealed by the Spirit and sin is taken away. “Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). If we have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, we are free from the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5:1); and while we are beholding the glory of the Lord, we are changed from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.

Tuesday: The Two Disciples of John – Read John 1:35-39. What course did John and Andrew pursue after witnessing the baptism of Jesus and hearing John? John, the younger son of Zebedee, in company with Andrew of Bethsaida, had sought baptism. It was there that they witnessed the anointing of Jesus, and heard the Baptist’s words, “Behold the Lamb of God.” John and Andrew were the two disciples who followed after Christ, and to whom He turned saying, “What seek ye?” They said unto Him, “Rabbi ...where dwellest thou?” And when He led them to the place where He abode, they talked with Him, they believed Him.

Wednesday: Philip and Nathanael – What was Nathanael’s testimony when he found Jesus, and would he have found Him had he sought help from leaders? Nathanael doubted, but Philip told him, “Come and see.” When he found Jesus, Nathanael testified: “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49). But “if Nathanael had trusted to the rabbis for guidance, he would never have found Jesus. It was by seeing and judging for himself that he became a disciple. So in the case of many today whom prejudice withholds from good. How different would be the result if they would ‘come and see’.” – {DA 140.5}.

Thursday: The Witness of Nicodemus – Read John 3:1-21. What key lesson ought we to learn which Jesus taught Nicodemus? 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}.