

Sabbath Lesson #13 – Epilogue: Knowing Jesus and His Word – 21-27 Dec 2024

Christ said to the Pharisees, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). He adds, “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (verses 46-47). The only Scriptures in the days of Christ were the books now known as the Old Testament; these testify of Christ. They were given for no other purpose. Scriptures are they that can make men “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15); and among those writings, Christ especially points out the books of Moses as revealing Him. He who reads the writings of Moses, and the entire Old Testament, with any other expectation than to find Christ, and the way of life through Him, will utterly fail of understanding them. His reading will be in vain.

Sunday: Meeting in Galilee – Read John 21:15-17; What is the significance of dialogue between Christ and Peter? Christ asked Peter three times if he loved Him [Greek words for types of ‘love’ supplied]: “So when they had dined, Jesus says to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, love [agapao] you Me more than these? He says unto Him, Yea, Lord; you know that I love [phileo] you. He says unto him, Feed My lambs. He says to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, love [agapao] you Me? He says unto Him, Yea, Lord; you know that I love [phileo] you. He says unto him, Feed My sheep. He says unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, love [phileo] you Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Love you [phileo] me? And he said unto Him, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you [phileo]. Jesus says unto him, Feed My sheep” (John 21:15-17). The first two times, when Christ asked Peter if he loved Him, Christ used agapao (which is the verbal form of agape in the present tense), for He was trying to get Peter to catch a glimpse of the unconditional love Christ offers (Hebrews 2:17-18). Christ asked him a second time, and not yet comprehending the import of His words, Peter gave the same answer; which was to be expected, as it was Christ Himself who first used the word “agape”, and associated it with submission, for until that time, Peter did not understand unconditional love (agape). When on the third time Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him with phileo, instead of agape, suddenly, Peter understood it. He acknowledged that just as Christ knows all things, so also was he, Peter, incapable of loving his fellow man with agape; for this is totally foreign to fallen man. Thus, in humility Peter was able to say to the Lord, “Lord, you know all things; you know I phileo you.” Over time, Peter, like Paul, realised that the only way by which he can love his fellow men with agape is by submitting his will to Christ’s will, so that he could say, it is not “I” (ego) that lives in me but the will of Christ, “Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20), so that he might then partake of the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), and be “made perfect in agape” (1 John 4:18). As Peter’s faith in Christ grew, so also did he begin to understand the difference between the unconditional love of Christ, and the conditional love of fallen man: “Seeing all of you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto sincere love of the brethren [phileo], see that all of you love [agapao] one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22). To every worker feeding the flock, Christ asks the same question: agapao me?

Monday: Keeping Your Eyes on Jesus – Read John 21:20-25; How does the disciples’ misunderstanding, later corrected, help us refute the erroneous tradition that the second coming of Christ takes place at death when the spirit is taken to heaven? When our Saviour was about to leave His sorrowful disciples, He told them that He was going to prepare a place for them (John 14:1-3): He informed them moreover of His design that they should ultimately be with Himself. But how was this to be accomplished? Was it through death, by which a deathless spirit would be released to soar away to meet its Saviour? No: but, says He, “I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am there ye may be also” (verse 3). The tradition has been developed to say that this coming of the Saviour is at death, but the disciples of our Lord did not so understand it (see John 21:22-23). Jesus incidentally remarked concerning one of his followers, “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me;” and the saying went immediately abroad among the disciples, on the strength of these words, that that disciple should not die. So far were the disciples from holding that death was the second coming of Christ, that when they understood their

Lord to intimate that John might remain until his return, they at once concluded that he would not die. And what foggy theology is this, that makes death the second appearing of Christ! Christ is coming as the Life-giver, and the believer's best friend. Death is the life-taker, and man's last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). Christ is coming to give life to the just, and to "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14). The devil has the power of death, and, in the providence of God, is permitted to send the barbed arrow even to the heart of the just, lay him low in death, and lock him in the tomb. But the Life-giver, having passed under the dominion of death, and having been gloriously raised from the embrace of the grave, triumphantly says, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [hades, the grave] and of death" (Revelation 1:18). The devil holds the power of death. Christ holds the keys of death and the grave, and at his second appearing he will unlock the tombs of the just, break the power of death, their last enemy, lead them forth to immortal and eternal scenes of glory.

Tuesday: Light and Darkness – Read John 8:42-44; When it comes to light and darkness, right and wrong, what is the only question? There is no question whatever in religion as to who is right or who is wrong. God alone is right, and there is no question about it. Unquestionably we are to believe what He says. The only question is: What does He say? Here it is not a question as to what this or that man, or one party or another, says that He says, but: What does He say? Every man must listen for himself, as only those who hear His voice can receive life from it. Men may preach the Word, but only God Himself can make it audible to the soul. God is talking to you in His Word. "Hear, and your soul shall live" (Isaiah 55:3). It has ever been the work of Satan to bear false witness against God, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). It must be Satan, therefore, that has made so many people believe that God is harsh, and stern, and unapproachable, for the truth is that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). God is love and so approachable that His word tells us that we may "come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Wednesday: Theology From "Above" or From "Below" – Read John 4:46-54; Is the theology of the nobleman in the story from below? The characterisation of theology from below by the Lesson writer is unnecessary. It is true, the nobleman had made the healing of his child a condition upon which to accept that Christ is the Son of God, which explains why Christ said to him, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (verse 48). "Yet, the nobleman had a degree of faith; for he had come to ask what seemed to him the most precious of all blessings" {DA 198.3}. "Like a flash of light, the Saviour's words to the nobleman laid bare his heart. He saw that his motives in seeking Jesus were selfish. His vacillating faith appeared to him in its true character. In deep distress he realized that his doubt might cost the life of his son. He knew that he was in the presence of One who could read the thoughts, and to whom all things were possible. In an agony of supplication he cried, "Sir, come down ere my child die." His faith took hold upon Christ as did Jacob, when, wrestling with the Angel, he cried, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." Genesis 32:26" {DA 198.4}. "Like Jacob he prevailed. The Saviour cannot withdraw from the soul that clings to Him, pleading its great need. "Go thy way," He said; "thy son liveth." The nobleman left the Saviour's presence with a peace and joy he had never known before. Not only did he believe that his son would be restored, but with strong confidence he trusted in Christ as the Redeemer" {DA 198.5}. Jesus taught the nobleman how to believe. He said, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." The man believed the Word and went his way. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." It was hearing the Word that gave the man faith.

Thursday: Abiding in Jesus – Read John 15:1-11; What is it to abide in Jesus? The work of the Christian is to abide in Christ. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing" (verses 4-6). The fruit which hangs upon the branches is produced by the nourishment supplied by the vine. Just so the work which the Christian does must be done by the energy of Christ flowing into him, or it amount to nothing.