

Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Paul: Mission and Message – 12-18 Sep 2015

Christ sent Paul to the Gentiles for a mission “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18). It is thus Paul taught them saying, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). Mission and message of Paul is based on first being filled with the Holy Spirit. Many want to do like Paul, but they ask not first to be filled with the Holy Spirit; by default they be filled with an evil spirit “transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). Saul of Tarsus, “yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” was overtaken by the Lord on Damascus road, and led blind into Damascus, and Ananias was sent to him to say, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:1, 17).

It is therefore important that, like Paul, who in his mission was led by the Holy Spirit, we truly seek the same leading of the Spirit of God. When Paul had gone “through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41), and had come “to Derbe and Lystra,” and “had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia,” he was “forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.” Then, “passing by Mysia,” Paul “came down to Troas.” Being at the sea, as far as he could go forward by land, and forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word anywhere in the region behind him, there the Spirit opened the way before him. “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:1-10).

Paul understood the importance of Spirit led mission and sought this for all. When Paul came to Ephesus, and there found certain disciples, the first question that he asked them – the first thing he said to them after the customary greeting – was, “Have ye receive the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:2). They had not heard of the Holy Spirit, knowing only John’s baptism. Paul explained that there was something beyond John’s baptism, – that the object of John’s baptism had come in the Lord Jesus, who had ascended again to heaven, and had solicited His Father to send “forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts” (Galatians 4:6), into the hearts of all believers in Jesus, who are buried and risen from the dead through baptism. “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them” (Acts 19:5-6).

Thus in Paul’s mission, as a minister of the gospel, his first inquiry was: have ye received the Holy Spirit? Thus the first work of the visiting minister was to see that they had received the Holy Spirit. That is how it was in the time of the former rain. We are “in the time of the latter rain,” which is to be more abundant than was the former. How much more abundantly, then, is it now the proper inquiry of true ministers of the gospel everywhere, first of all, “did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” and the first thing of all in the work of the ministry to see that they have received the Holy Spirit. These things were all written for us.

Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed? Do you say that you do not know how? Do you know how to receive forgiveness of sins? If you do, you know how to receive the Holy Spirit. The Lord tells you to confess your sins, and that He is faithful and just to forgive you. You confess your sins, accept His forgiveness, and then thank Him for it. You know you are forgiven, for He says so. Do you know how to receive the righteousness of God? If so, you know how to receive the Holy Spirit. Righteousness is the free gift of God, received by believing God. It is received by faith. So, also, is the promise of the Holy Spirit received by faith; the Holy Spirit is received precisely as any other gift is received from God.

Let us ask the Lord for His Spirit. It is His will to give us His Spirit, just for asking. “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him” (1 John 5:14-15). You ask according to His will in asking for His Spirit. Having asked, you know you have received, for He says so. Then thank Him, and continue to thank Him, that you have received His Spirit. How you may *feel* has nothing

to do with it; not how you feel, but what *He* says: “Ask, and it shall be given you;” “Receive ye the Holy Ghost;” and “Be filled with the Spirit” (Luke 11:9; John 20:22; Ephesians 5:18).

Paul preached Christ crucified. You may say, ‘surely Paul preached something besides that – that would do well enough for an introduction in preaching to the people, but he must have gone on beyond that.’ But Paul himself told the Corinthians that he was determined to know nothing among them “save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2), and the preaching of that brought out a church in Corinth, a church keeping the commandments of God, instructed in all Christian duty, and possessing in abundant measure the gifts of the Spirit. In his message, Paul preached the gospel, that is, “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

The message, Christ crucified, is Christ alive. He is crucified now; He is the Crucified One; but He lives. “It was not possible,” says Peter, that having been crucified He should be held in the grave (Acts 2:24). There was, and we thank God for the revelation of that truth, a risk of everything on Christ’s part in coming to this earth in the likeness of sinful flesh, so that every one of us has just exactly as good a chance and prospect of overcoming as He had. But when Christ was crucified, all doubt was forever settled. It is the power of the cross that settled everything. “It is finished” (John 19:30), He said, and then the complete victory was gained, and the devil was forever vanquished. His resurrection was assured, for it was not possible for the enemy to hold Him in the tomb, since he had not been able to lead Him to sin. In His cross, He had “spoiled principalities and powers,” “openly triumphing over them” (Colossians 2:15). There was no doubt then of His being raised above all principalities and powers. Christ says that if He is lifted up from the earth, He will draw all men. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). Christ is lifted up from the earth. So when I am crucified with Christ I am lifted up from the earth. I rise to walk in heaven’s own light, above the world and sin. This crucifixion means more to the believer every day. It means death to sin, crucifixion itself. “For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God” (Romans 6:10).

When Paul said, and when you and I can also say, “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20), it means that that sin, that miserable thing which has been the taproot of all my wicked life, “the sin that doth so easily beset” me (Hebrews 12:1), is crucified with Him. When that can be said from the heart, letting every wicked thing go, then know of a surety that Christ crucified is Christ lifted up from the earth, and ourselves with Him. That crucifixion is a present thing. It never can be in the past. We may say, ‘I was crucified with Christ.’ But so long as we can say, “I am crucified,” in that crucifixion we are lifted up from the earth. “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). When we are crucified with Christ that means that it is the power of God to us. And that is the Gospel; “for it is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). And there are infinite worlds of glory and gladness in the cross of Christ.

Christ crucified was “*us*.” He was of the same flesh and blood with us. He was of our very nature. He was in all points like us. “It behoved Him to be made in all points like unto His brethren” (Hebrews 2:17). He emptied Himself, and was made in the likeness of men. He was “the last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Precisely as the first Adam was ourselves, so Christ, the last Adam, was ourselves. When the first Adam died, we, being involved in him, died with him. And when the last Adam was crucified, – He being ourselves, and we being involved in him, – we were crucified *with Him*. As the first Adam was in himself the whole human race, so the last Adam was in *Himself* the whole human race; and so when the last Adam was crucified, the whole human race – the old sinful human nature – was crucified with Him. And so it is written: “Knowing this, that *our old man* is crucified with Him, *that the body of sin* might be *destroyed*, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6).

Thus every soul in this world can truly say, in the perfect triumph of Christian faith, “I am crucified with Christ;” my old sinful nature is crucified with Him, that this body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth I should not serve sin. “Nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Always bearing about in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus – the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, for I am crucified with Him – that *the life also of Jesus* might be made manifest in my body. For I who live am always delivered unto death, for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in my mortal flesh (2 Corinthians 4:10-11).