

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – Symbolic Acts – 31 October-6 November 2015

Christ would have us learn the lesson of clay and the potter. “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Romans 9:21). This reflects the same question the Lord asked through the prophet Jeremiah: “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay *is* in the potter’s hand, so *are* ye in mine hand, O house of Israel” (Jeremiah 18:6). Our response ought to be: “But now, O Lord, thou art our Father, we are the clay, and thou our Potter; and we are all the work of Thy hand” (Isaiah 64:8). By virtue of creating us, God has a right to our bodies and our spirit. Many refuse to yield to God. Our Lesson this week discusses symbolic acts in Jeremiah, but we focus on the potter and clay.

By our own nature we are servants of sin and Satan, but as soon as we yield to God, we become loosed from Satan’s power. It is thus Paul says, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). As soon as we become free from the bondage of sin, we become redeemed servants of God. The very act of loosing us from the power of sin, in answer to our faith, proves God’s acceptance of us as His servants. We become the servants of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1), called unto liberty (Galatians 5:13), for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Be the Lord’s servant as passive clay in the potter’s hands.

The importance of fully surrendering to Christ, as fully as to become passive in His hands, as clay is passive in the potter’s hands, becomes clear when we understand the battle. No sooner we are freed from sin comes the conflict again. Satan is not disposed to give up his slave so readily. He comes, armed with the lash of fierce temptation, to drive us again to his service. We know by sad experience that he is more powerful than we are, and that unaided we cannot resist him. But we dread his power and cry for help. Then we call to mind that we are no longer Satan’s servants. We have submitted ourselves to Christ; He accepted us as His servants. So we can say with the Psalmist, “O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds” (Psalm 116:16). But the fact that Christ has loosed the bonds that Satan had thrown around us – and He has done this if we believe that He has – is evidence that Christ will protect us, for He cares for His own, and we have the assurance that He that has begun a good work in us “will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). In this confidence we are strong to resist.

If we have yielded to God, we are His servants; we are “instruments of righteousness” in His hands (Romans 6:13-16). Of course we are not inert, lifeless, senseless instruments, which have no voice as to how they shall be used, but living, intelligent instruments, who are permitted to choose their occupation. Nevertheless, the term “instrument” signifies a tool – something that is entirely under the control of the artisan. The difference between us and the tools of the mechanic is that we can choose who shall use us and at what kind of service we shall be employed, but having made the choice and yielded ourselves into the hands of the workman, we are to be as completely in his hands as is the tool that has no voice as to how it shall be used. When we yield to God, we are to be in His hands as clay in the hands of the potter, that He may do with us as He pleases. Our volition lies in choosing whether or not we will let Him work in us that which is good. Let us be as passive clay in potter’s hands.

This idea of being clay in the hands of a potter, or an instrument in the hands of God, is a wonderful aid to the victory of faith when it is once fully grasped. What an instrument will do depends entirely upon the person in whose hands it is. The instrument is innocent enough in itself, yet it may be used for the basest purposes, as well as for that which is useful. If it be in the hands of a bad character, it certainly will not be used for any good purpose. If it be in the hands of an upright, virtuous man, it cannot possibly do any harm. Likewise, when we were the servants of Satan, we did no good (Romans 6:20), but now that we have yielded ourselves into the hands of God, we know that there is no unrighteousness in Him, and so an instrument in His hands cannot be used for an evil purpose. The yielding to God must be as complete as it was formerly to Satan, for the apostle says: “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh; for as ye have yielded your members servants to

uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Romans 6:19). Yield as passive clay in the potter's hands.

The whole secret of overcoming sin, then, lies in first wholly yielding to God with a sincere desire to do His will; next, in knowing that in our yielding He accepts us as His servants; and then, in retaining that submission to Him and passively leaving ourselves in His hands. Often victory can be gained only by repeating again and again: "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid; thou hast loosed my bonds" (Psalm 116:16). This is simply an emphatic way of saying, 'O Lord, I have yielded myself into Thy hands as an instrument of righteousness; let Thy will be done, and not the dictates of my carnal flesh.'

But when we can realise the force of that scripture and feel indeed that we are servants of God, immediately will come the thought, 'Well, if I am indeed an instrument in the hands of God, He cannot use me to do evil with, nor can he permit me to do evil as long as I remain in His hands. He must keep me if I am kept from evil, because I cannot keep myself. But He wants to keep me from evil, for He has shown His desire, and also His power to fulfil His desire in giving Himself for me. Therefore I shall be kept from this evil.' All these thoughts may pass through the mind instantly and each time our old self arises, and then with them must necessarily come a feeling of gladness that we shall be kept from the dreaded evil. That gladness naturally finds expression in thanksgiving to God, and while we are thanking God the enemy retires with his temptation, and the peace of God fills the heart. Then we find that the joy in believing far outweighs all the joy that comes from indulgence in sin.

Like the passive clay in the hands of the potter, so must our submission to God be. The secret of passive submission is to acknowledge that "in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18), and that "*there is none good but one, that is, God*" (Mark 10:18); that without Christ "ye can do nothing" (John 15:5), "that power belongeth unto God" (Psalm 62:11), that ye are weak, but Christ's "grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:9); and that Christ has the power to manifest Himself in the flesh today as two thousand years ago, if we will but let Him, as we fully submit to the righteousness of God. Exaltation comes only through self-abasement. Christian victorious life comes only through unreserved submission to God, as the clay is passive in the hands of the potter. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of Your mercy, because of Your truth" (Psalm 115:1).

If yielded to God, "now are we the sons of God" (1 John 3:2) in Christ, for in Christ we are raised up to sit with Him in the heavenly places, and hence God has placed us "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion" (Ephesians 1:21). In this exaltation, there is nothing for us to boast about, for we are nothing. The power is the Lord's, which He is pleased to manifest through us, when we fully yield to Him, and fully depend on Him. Then Christ promises, "he that overcometh and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I have received of My Father" (Revelation 2:26-27).

Here Christ says that His disciples shall share the same power and authority that the Father gives to Him – the authority mentioned in Psalm 2:7-9. 'Yes,' some one will say, 'but this is all future.' Very true, and even so it is future in the case of Christ. Not yet does He rule the nations with a rod of iron, and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel; but the power to do so is His, nevertheless. His power is exerted to save them, until they absolutely and finally refuse to be saved, when it will remove them. When Christ begins to execute judgment, His saints will share the honour with Him (Psalm 149:5-9), and in the meantime He imparts to them His own power, that they may carry forward His work of reconciliation.

"If by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17). "Shall reign in life," when? Why, when life comes, of course. And when does life come? When we are dead unto sin, but arise in Christ, to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). When men yield themselves to God "as those that are alive from the dead," sin shall not have dominion over them (Romans 6:13-14). Instead of being ruled, they will rule. From slaves, they will become kings, with power over the flesh. "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city" (Proverbs 16:32), for Christ's power by which man ruleth his spirit is the power by which the whole earth is to be made new, and the first dominion restored.