

## Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Jeremiah's Yoke – 21-27 November 2015

**C**hrist would have us deny self and surrender to Him. We focus on the memory text in this week's Lesson, it is from Luke instead of Jeremiah; it refers to 'cross' instead of 'yoke;' "The yoke and the cross are symbols representing the same thing – the giving up of the will to God" {RH Oct 23, 1900}; it says: "And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

For the people, Jeremiah bore the yoke (Jeremiah 27:1-18); we are to take up the cross. But our failure lies in making a distinction between the cross of Christ and our own crosses. There is no cross that comes to any person on earth, except the cross of Christ. If we will always remember this, it will be life and joy to us. The Lord does not give us some crosses of our own, – little crosses adapted to different ones, – one having one cross and another having another cross. We cannot separate Christ from His cross. Christ is crucified; He is the only crucified One; therefore whatever cross comes to us must be the cross of Christ; and that cross is with us continually. Moreover, in the cross of Christ we find Christ Himself.

What do we get through the cross? – Forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). "That He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross" (Ephesians 2:16). It is the cross, then, that unites us to God, and makes us one with Him. Everything then that is a real cross is life to us, because it brings us to God. Take the things that come to us: new duties, perhaps, are revealed to us; sins, it may be, are shown to us so that they must be denied. It is often the case that different things come up that cut directly across our habits and our own way and convenience. Either we can take them in a hard and cheerless way, groaning over our religion, and giving everybody that comes near us the idea that it does not agree with us, but that we must endure the service of Christ, hoping that by and by we shall get something better, when we get out of this grinding service. Or we can find joy in the cross, and salvation and peace and rest, by recognising that cross as the cross of Christ.

Suppose we are stingy, yet we have to make sacrifices for the cause of God. We groan over it, but finally by dint of hard work, will manage to donate something. And then we think afterwards of what a hard cross we have borne. Or take the Sabbath as a typical case. To keep the Lord's Sabbath is very inconvenient for our business, and we perhaps stumble over that cross a long time. But there it is plainly before us: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God" (Exodus 20:10). If we do not keep the Sabbath, we are afraid we shall be lost. So in order to save ourselves from destruction, we agree to keep the Sabbath. It is a weekly cross, and we are always thinking of the inconvenience and hardship. Surely it must be we shall get credit for that because it is so hard to do. Not so; when we take it that way it is our own cross, with Christ left out; and there is no salvation except in the cross of Christ.

With a thousand other things it is the same. We mourn over them, and it is only by will power that we force ourselves up to the rack, take the bitter medicine, consoling ourselves with the thought that 'by and by all this will be ended. We shall not have such hard times when we get to heaven.' This is put rather strongly and yet this is the idea of the Christian life with a great many who profess to be Christians. The mistaken idea that is so commonly practiced is that the harder the cross is, the more joy there will be when it is all done with.

That is not Christianity at all. It is heathenism. How much more Christianity is there in that than in the case of the man who puts pebbles into his boots and goes on a pilgrimage, so that the worse he can make himself feel now, the better he will feel when his journey is ended? The only difference is in the sort of penance we endure. We take this duty and that as scourges with which to afflict ourselves, thinking we are working out everlasting joy for ourselves by and by. Now all these things that we may be labouring over may be things that God requires us to do. He does not require us to scourge ourselves with whips, or to go on pilgrimages on our knees. But the only difference between ourselves, when we have made burdens of our duties, and the man who has scourged himself or taken a hard pilgrimage, is that we make our penances out of those things which God requires, and he makes his out of those things which the Lord has not required. Yet we may often think we are better than he!

Both classes are trying to put up a cross that would take the place of the cross of Christ. People ask the Lord to accept their offering for sin. Every cross men bear in that way is hard. If that were all that is in the cross, those crosses ought to have served the purpose, for they are bitter and cruel enough. Surely then there must be something else in the cross besides hardness. A popular idea is that anything discomfort, that a person does not like to do, is a cross, and men perform duties in a way that make them uncomfortable all the time.

It makes no difference how much people talk about the Lord, how much they say they believe in Christ, how much they call themselves Christians; the setting up of a cross aside from the cross of Christ, is opposition to Christ. The idea has been, 'No cross no crown;' 'the more we suffer, the more we shall enjoy by and by. This is the time of suffering; by and by we shall have the time of enjoyment.' So we will endure it. We think these crosses will bring us nearer to God. As a matter of fact, try as hard as we can, even at things that are right in themselves, we cannot get nearer to God than before. We will be always wanting to get nearer, and yet finding ourselves afar off. In such a way we do not have Christ in our cross, although we may persuade ourselves that we are believing in Christ and bearing His cross. If we have Christ in the crosses that we bear, we should be brought near to God. But the trouble is that we often have a cross in the place of the cross of Christ – a substitute for it.

There is only one actual cross in the world, and that is the cross of Jesus Christ. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). We may think we are denying self, when we are only building self up; we are putting ourselves in the place of Christ. Our talk of self-denial is but often a denial of Christ.

The question for everyone is: Do you know that Christ lives in you? Are you joined to Him? There are many professed Seventh-day Adventists who dare not say that Christ lives in them; they do not know that Christ is one with them. If we are bearing crosses after the manner we have described, we cannot say, "Christ liveth in me." So we are separated from Him, and thus separated from His cross. It is self in the place of Christ, "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:5), for the power of godliness is the cross of Christ. Sadly, often we deny the cross of Christ, and so we deny the power of the gospel.

We are not crucified with Christ except we are one with Him in the crucifixion. Christ must be identified with us in the cross, for it is His. There is no crucifixion of the man that amounts to anything unless he is crucified with Christ. Crucified together with Him, there is virtue to us, because we get the virtue that is in Christ. That virtue is freedom, separation from sin, and redemption, life, joy, and peace. It is not so difficult a thing to bear the cross when we are crucified with Christ. Christ is with us and in us. Now it is Christ enduring the cross, and to us there is joy in the Lord in it. Christ is made peace for us through the blood of His cross.

Christ was crucified for sin. There was no cross except for sin. He bore our sins. There is wonderful joy that comes to us in this, that while we are yet dead in sins we are permitted to claim Christ as ours, and to say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). If we could not assert this with all assurance while yet sinners, we never could assert it. But while in sin we may claim Christ as ours, and that He is in us. We know it because the Spirit of Christ says that it is so. To the man who believes the Lord and dares assert it, it is everlasting strength. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-5). We could not be quickened or made alive together, unless dead together. So Christ identifies Himself with us in death, even the death in trespasses and sins, and it is He who bears the burden in His own body on the cross; and while we are crucified with Him we also live with Him, delivered from sin.

Christ is crucified for us, and we are crucified with Him. To take up the cross is to take in Christ. To deny self is to retain Him. To crucify self is to take His life, and the life we live with Christ is not of hardness and discomfort, and it is not the performance of disagreeable duties for the sake of getting by and by; it is the constant springing up of life and joy, so that with joy and not groaning we "draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). To have His cross makes all the difference! "Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head" (Isaiah 51:11).