

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – The Sermon on the Mount – 9-15 April 2016

Christ in His sermon on the Mount preached to the multitude the good news of our salvation. “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29). We focus on verses 4 and 5 of Matthew the fifth chapter.

“Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4). There are two questions that one naturally wishes to have answered when reading this text, namely, What mourners shall be comforted? and When shall they be comforted? Note the fact that the promise is unlimited. Christ said that He was sent “to comfort all that mourn” (Isaiah 61:2).

God is no respecter of persons; He does not single out special cases to be the recipients of His grace. This promise is for every mourner. The first and most natural thought that is suggested by the word “mourn” is of sorrow caused by affliction and bereavement. That the Lord comforts such mourners, is shown by His whole earthly life, and especially manifest in the case of the widow of Nain (in Luke 7), and at the grave of Lazarus (in John 11). He has comfort for every manner of grief. But death is a result of sin. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin” (Romans 5:12). “The sting of death is sin” (1 Corinthians 15:56). If it were not for sin, there would be no mourning. Therefore the Lord specially comforts those who mourn for their sins. One thing, however, is necessary, and that is that the mourners should know this promise. It is self evident that in order to be comforted one must know where comfort is to be obtained. The mourner must believe this promise of the Lord, and become acquainted with Him through it. There is absolutely no limit to the promise, and no other qualification than that the mourner should believe and know the Lord. Whoever accepts the word of the Lord in good faith shall be comforted, no matter for what he mourns.

When shall they be comforted? Let the Scriptures answer: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ” (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

Whoever is afflicted for any cause whatever, may know if he will that he is afflicted with Christ. “In all their afflictions He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9). Even though the affliction be directly because of sin, we may have the same assurance for we are told, “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted,” and, “for the transgression of My people was He stricken” (Isaiah 53:7-8). That thought alone that Christ bears with us the burden of grief or temptation, is enough to make it light – because it draws our minds away from ourselves.

But Christ cannot be divided. The one who has Christ has Him for all that there is in Him. Therefore if our faith grasps Him in His sufferings, – that is, if we remember that “He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4), so that we bear them only in Him, – then it is most certain that we shall have at the same time all the comfort there is in Him. As “the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2) enabled Him to endure the cross, and despise the shame, so the joy that there is in Him enables us to rejoice in tribulation.

“Blessed are the meek” (Matthew 5:5). These words were spoken by Christ, among the beatitudes pronounced by Him in His sermon on the mount. The reason there assigned is, “For they shall inherit the earth.” But there is a present blessing in meekness as well as a future one. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and a natural accompaniment of that “love, joy, peace” (Galatians 5), which is the Christian’s heritage in this life, as well as in that to come.

Without meekness there can be no real enjoyment of spiritual blessings. The person who will take honour and glory to himself cannot be altogether at peace with Him who claims all honour and glory and power as due to Himself. So far as a man ascribes these to himself, he makes himself a rival of God. He cannot under such circumstances love God with all his might, mind and strength. Meekness is in short the opposite of selfishness, which strikes directly against all the fruits of the Spirit, causing an individual to take to himself that which belongs alone to God. And in taking to self that which is God’s – or attempting to do so – an individual does not in reality get anything, and loses all that which God is able to give him.

But what is meekness? It may be said, in the first place, that Christian meekness (which is the only true meekness) is not altogether what it is popularly supposed to be. The false

common idea of meekness allies it with weakness, – lack of will. It pictures the meek person as one who makes little or no resistance to persons or things that set themselves against him. But this idea is entirely false. It has no place in the make-up of the meek characters of the Scripture record. It should be evident, at a glance, that the Spirit of God, which is all-powerful, cannot produce as one of its fruits anything that lacks force and strength.

Meekness is not the absence of will, but the absence of self. Among Scripture characters with whom the idea of meekness is naturally associated, probably none are more prominent than Moses, and John the disciple of Christ. The record of Moses is that he “was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). But no one at all familiar with the events of his life could think of him as a weak character, or lacking in resoluteness and power of will. While he persistently refused to be the father of a great nation, or to be angry with those who murmured against him, he was never slow to take vigorous measures for the suppression of idolatry and other sins, no matter how great the number arrayed against him. He was, indeed, one of the most energetic and forceful characters that the world has ever seen. The same decision of character was possessed by John. John was an apt pupil in the school of Christ, and his natural traits of character were tempered by the lessons he there received. But while self was repressed, there was no loss in force of will. And this is evident from a glance at his epistles to the church. No one of the inspired writers, indeed, uses plainer, more forceful language than does John. His speech, like the speech of Paul, was “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:4). He simply let himself become a mouthpiece of the Spirit and an instrument of Omnipotence, and decision enforced appeared as an inevitable consequence in all that he said and did.

At the very foundation of meekness, lies the conviction that the very best place for us to be is the place where God wants us to be. If that place is up above the heads of others, it is all right; and if it is down under their feet, it is just as well. Wherever it may be, it is the only place we can afford to be in. We cannot afford to occupy a high place when God wants us to fill a humble one; we cannot afford to remain in a humble place when God wants us to fill one higher up. There is a selfishness which affects humility as well as one which is proud. Moses displayed a touch of the former at the burning bush in the desert, when he begged to be released from going before Pharaoh, on the plea that he was too humble an instrument to accomplish the work; and there have been many since his day who evaded responsibilities in the work of God under the same plea. But such humility is only professed, not real. True humility never rebels against God’s purposes under any pretext whatever. True humility is the absence of self, so that so far as the individual is concerned, there is nothing in the way of the accomplishment of God’s will in any direction. One of the greatest blessings of meekness is the peace which it brings into the individual’s daily life. For if he is fully persuaded that the place God wants him to be in is the best place for him and the only place he can afford to be in, all chance for murmuring is taken out of his life. He simply feels that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28), and he leaves the result with Him. He has “godliness with contentment” which “is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6).

But how will he know when he is in the position that God wants him to fill? The Bible has answered this question. The Psalmist says, “the meek will He guide in judgment; the meek will He teach His way” (Psalms 25:9). The meek person is the only one that God can teach, because he is the only one that will not trust in his own wisdom. It is with the meek person that God dwells, and that he should be led of God when God dwells with him, is inevitable. We are told that “the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity,” said, “I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15). Thus the meek person dwells with God, and in whatever place he may be, he knows that God is there too. God never asks an individual to be in a humbler place than He is willing to be in Himself. The meek person dwells with God. He is safe; he is contented; he has instruction in the ways of the Highest. He will be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger (Zephaniah 2:3). He will inherit the earth (Psalms 37:11). He is willing, for all this, to give up self. Is not the exchange a good one? Truly we can well afford to exchange the highest position that earth can offer for the lowest place that God wants us to fill. The highest position without God is lower than the lowest place with Him. “Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker” (Proverbs 17:5).