

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – The Seen and the Unseen War – 23-29 April 2016

Christ is our defender in the seen and unseen war. But we are all involved in the great controversy between Christ and Satan in that we make choices everyday that place us either on Christ's winning side or Satan's losing side. In this Lesson, we focus on understanding what Christ meant by saying, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12).

We are to "resist the devil, and he will flee" from us (James 4:7); but we resist the devil only by yielding to God. When we yield our bodies "as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13), we have in our bodies the power of the living God. Against that power of God nothing can stand. We are ever reminded, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). Who would reign as a king with God, with power greater than all the kings of earth combined? – let him yield himself, soul and body, to the Lord, and the power that renews all things, even the face of the sin-cursed earth, is his.

We read of Jacob, "by his strength he had power with God. Yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto Him: he found Him in Bethel, and there He spake with us; Even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is His memorial" (Hosea 12:3-5). It was "by his strength" that Jacob prevailed. And what was his strength? It was his helplessness. Jacob wrestled all night with one whom he supposed was a man seeking to take his life; but when that mysterious stranger touched his thigh and put it out of joint, he knew that he was in the presence of the Lord. Then what did he do? He most certainly did the only thing that a man under such circumstances, with his thigh suddenly put out of joint, could do – with 'violent' boldness, he threw his arms round the neck of the Angel for support.

And now a wonderful thing happens: the victor turns suppliant. He who had power utterly to disable Jacob with a light touch, begs the stricken, clinging man to let Him go. What does this show? – That the Lord cannot tear Himself away from the helpless one that clings to Him for support. He is the Almighty, and can easily loose the joints of the stoutest wrestler, but He cannot unloose the arms that confidently clasp His neck. Jacob caught at that word, "Let Me go," and declared, "I will not" (Genesis 32:26). Ah, with what boldness we may draw near the Lord! "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

The kingdom of God is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). But this perfect peace and joy of righteousness can be attained and held only by fierce fighting with principalities and powers that work within us, stirring up the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Peace means victory gained; but inasmuch as our foes continually rage against us, continual victory can be maintained only by continual warfare in Christ.

Our suffering in this warfare is all with Christ, for He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15). He bears all our sins and sicknesses, so that His victory is ours. It is not merely that we have His victory as an encouragement to us, but that the victory that He gained was over our sins, and His deliverance was from the death that was on us. And this victory and deliverance He won in our flesh. Therefore when we can say with "full assurance of faith," "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," we have "passed out of death into life," and have the power of the resurrection as our daily experience. Having suffered with Christ, we have with Him entered into His glory, and are, with Him, waiting for "the manifestation of the sons of God."

"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12). "Every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). And whoever enters must wage a fierce warfare with the fleshly lusts that stand in the way. As in Bunyan's narrative, its doors stand open, and the shining ones invitingly sing, "Come in, come in; Eternal glory thou shalt win" (John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Leeds: George Wilson, 1811, p 32), but blows must be given and received in the passage. Thank God, His armour has been tested and proved invincible, and we do not fight uncertainly, "as one that beateth the air" (1 Corinthians 9:26).

In the first chapter of second Corinthians, verses 18-20, we find the following positive statements: "But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and

Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in Him was yea. For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” In this fact alone the sinner finds all the confidence in approaching to God. It is through Jesus we come to the Father (John 14:6). “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever,” is the sinner’s only hope. It is not to taunt them, nor to glory in disappointing them, that the gracious call is given to men. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1).

Says Jesus, “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37); and Paul says that, “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him” (Hebrews 7:25). The apostle also says: “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Faith and boldness are characteristics that the Lord wants those to manifest who come to Him.

There is a *‘perhaps’* gospel out there, which exhorts the sinner to resolve to throw himself prostrate before God, to confess his sins, and plead for mercy, and then he is *‘encouraged’* with the thought that *‘perhaps’* God will hear his prayer, and admit his plea. But it is not in that manner that God encourages those who are sick of sin – no, not so! Says the beloved disciple, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). He promises that “He will have mercy upon” and “abundantly pardon” (Isaiah 55:7) those who turn to Him confessing and forsaking their sins.

We cannot enter the kingdom of God by faith based on a *‘perhaps’* gospel. Christ says: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29). There is no *‘perhaps’* about this. “God is love;” He has revealed Himself to us as a God that “delighteth in mercy.” The surety of this is found in the fact that Jesus died for us. “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

As we have seen, there is no such thing as *‘perhaps’* with God. James says that with Him is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” Those who come to Him, doubtful if they will receive what they ask for, must displease Him, because they reflect upon His truthfulness. That God is displeased with the one who doubts, is evident from Hebrews 11:6, and also from the following words: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (James 1:5-7).

We enter the kingdom of God, in the seen and unseen war, with bold faith. He who thinks that *‘perhaps’* God will hear his prayer, thinks that *‘perhaps’* He will not; such an one cannot ask in faith, nothing wavering, and consequently cannot receive anything. The only way to have is to ask boldly. Yea, it is by this boldness we take the kingdom of Heaven by force.

God is pleased to have us come to Him with bold confidence, because it shows that we believe what He says; and His own glory depends on the fulfillment of His promises. Says Paul: “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, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7). That is, God intends to exhibit us throughout eternity, as an evidence of the exceeding riches of His grace; the souls that are saved will be an everlasting trophy of His unchanging goodness; how then can it be imagined that He will not hear the prayer of the contrite soul, with whom He has said that He delights to dwell? It is with violence-like boldness that violent-like faith takes the kingdom of Heaven by force.