

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – Jesus on Community Outreach – 23-29 July 2016

Christ would have His followers reach out to the community to prepare a people for His Second Coming. Of His earthly ministry, we read: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23). Herein we focus on lesson’s section entitled “Jesus’ mission statement” – the key text: “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).

In the teaching of Jesus there was no conjecture, no speculation, no doubt. He did not give the people various theories, from which they might choose, indicating the one which He thought most plausible. Neither did He quote the opinions of humans as commonly done by most teachers, to add weight to His own views. He did not prepare the minds of His hearers for future doubt, by telling them that this was the way the matter looked to Him, or that He believed so and so, and He spoke only that which He knew, and thus He could speak with authority. Jesus spoke facts, not fancies; truths, not theories; and the power of simple truth spoken with the earnestness of actual, experimental knowledge produced conviction.

Jesus said to His disciples before He left the earth, “As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). The commission of every true follower of God is that of Christ Himself. “He whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God” (John 3:34). Therefore He whom the Lord sends must speak with the same authority as Christ Himself. “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” – God ‘hath put in us the word of reconciliation,’ and now, as though God did beseech men by us, we are to pray them in Christ’s stead, “Be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:19-20). So the Lord says to those that “follow after righteousness,” “I have put My words in thy mouth” (Isaiah 51:16). If our acceptance of Christ is such as to make that true of us individually, we cannot but speak with authority.

It is very common for people to refer to learned and pious men as authority for their belief. When questioned about any point of doctrine, they will tell what ‘our church holds,’ or what Professor or Doctor so-and-so has said. Now the opinion which they quote may be correct, and the man to whom they refer may be sound in the faith, so that they may not be teaching error; but often they who refer to them do not know for themselves whether it is true or not. Often, not always necessarily the case, the fact that they began by telling what somebody holds or has said on the subject, is the strongest proof that they do not know for themselves.

Suppose I am travelling through the country, and I ask a boy the way to a certain town. He begins with, ‘My father says,’ or ‘Dr so-and-so maintains,’ or, ‘It is commonly held by the best judges,’ or something of that kind, and then proceeds to tell what they say about the way. Now it may happen that his directions are correct, but the very first words of his answer convince me that he himself knows nothing about the way. He has heard it told until he can repeat it, but he does not know it for himself. The probability is that few travellers would wait for him to repeat his story, but would pass on to inquire of some one who would speak with authority. But if he should promptly reply, ‘Take the first turning on the right, and the second on the left, and keep straight on,’ I should conclude that he knew what he was talking about.

Ah, you may now pose a question to the foregoing, ‘But suppose he should be mistaken; would it not be better for him not to speak so positively?’ – No; it would be better to say, ‘I do not know.’ It would be a serious matter if, in order not to appear ignorant, I should direct a man west when the place which he seeks is east. Yet many do so. Everyone will agree that the one who directs the traveller on his way must speak with authority. He who cannot speak thus, must confess his inability, and say nothing. But our best guesses are good for nothing, and to repeat to me the conflicting opinions of different men only puzzles me the more.

Positiveness is as much more necessary in religious matters as eternal life is more important than trivial matters of this life. But may we speak with positiveness on spiritual matters? – Certainly, even as Christ and the apostles did. We may know God by personal acquaintance. The Apostle Paul said, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12). Knowing Him, we know Him to be faithful and true, and so we may know for a certainty all

that His word declares. Only a positive testimony can produce conviction and conversion. Get acquainted with Christ; learn of Him; and all hesitancy and doubt will disappear.

One day as Jesus was teaching in the temple, after performing mighty miracles, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him, and said, "By what authority doest Thou these things? and who gave Thee this authority?" Jesus did not answer their questions, and it was not necessary. The questions showed that they recognised that He had authority, and it did not make any difference where He got it, or who gave it to Him, as long as He had it.

And what was His authority to teach the people and to heal the sick? – It was the ability to do it. The ability to do a thing, and to do it well, is all the authority anybody needs; it is, in fact, all the real authority anybody can have. Christ in you will command the same authority.

When Jesus had ended His talk on the mountain, "the people were astonished at His doctrine; for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." The scribes had some sort of 'authority' to teach. If they did not happen to have it in their pockets, they could take one to their homes, and exhibit their piece of paper or parchment, certifying the fact that they had studied through the prescribed course or been at a theological seminary, and they were authorised to teach the law. Christ had no "authority" from men, but He had something that the people needed, and which they appreciated, and they never asked to see His credentials. His words and deeds were His credentials. Jesus was "a man approved of God" "by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him" (Acts 2:22).

Thus it was with the apostles. Peter and John were the agents of a mighty miracle of healing, for which they were arrested and brought before the Jewish Council. They were irregular ministers in the eyes of the established Jewish church, unlicensed practitioners, and they were questioned as to their right to do such things. Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, told them that the power of the name of Jesus had done the work; and the rulers, "beholding the man which was healed standing with them" "could say nothing against it" (Acts 4:14). The name of Jesus, in which they stood, was their authority for making the helpless to stand.

No man was ever subjected to closer scrutiny, or met with greater opposition, than the Apostle Paul. He had much opposition from the established church. His right to be called an apostle was denied; but this gave him no anxiety. He wrote: "Need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written, in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2 Corinthians 3:1-2). Even so Christ said: "I receive not testimony from man." "The works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me" (John 5:34, 36).

God Himself gives the same credentials to every one whom He sends forth. "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God" (John 3:34), and God's words are authoritative. He makes us able to be ministers of the new covenant, even of the quickened Spirit of Christ that gives life. Whoever steadily and constantly holds forth the Word of life will never be embarrassed by any sudden challenge of his authority, or call for his credentials. The power to do gives the right to do; and whoever has not the power can never have the authority. This authority everyone may have, it comes with the reception of the Spirit of Christ, for "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Galatians 4:6).

"And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:15). The Greek word here rendered "letters," is the word meaning *scriptures* or *writings*. A learned man, one well acquainted with books, is commonly called "a man of letters," or a literary man. Now there are many books, but only one that is so prominent as to be sufficiently designated by the term "the Book," and that is the Bible; for the word *Bible* means simply *book*. So "the writings," when used in the Bible without qualification, mean the sacred writings, or the Scriptures. The text above quoted should therefore be rendered, as it is in some versions, "How does this man know the Scriptures, never having learned?"

Jesus never studied in the Jewish schools; He got His knowledge from the Word of God. All Jewish children were taught the Book of the Law, according to the command of the Lord by Moses (Deuteronomy 5:6-7). Many parents taught carelessly, and often mingled with their instruction many idle traditions learned from the theologians; but children of faithful parents knew the Holy Scriptures from childhood. With the child Jesus this was no routine task, for He says, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within My heart" (Psalms 40:8).