

## Sabbath School Lesson #6 – Jesus Mingled With People – 30 July-5 August 2016

**C**hrist mingled with people desiring their good. We read of Him: “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luke 15:1-2).

We draw from chapter fifteen of Luke; and as you recall the instruction given in fourteenth of Luke you see that the fifteenth chapter is the natural sequence of it. Jesus had told the Pharisees that when they made a feast they should invite “the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind,” and had, under the form of a parable, shown that it is just such ones whom God compels to come to the great marriage supper which He prepares. It was inevitable, therefore, that Christ, as the true Teacher, should receive and eat with the outcast people.

Judah was under the power of Rome, and was compelled to pay tribute. But the Jews, remembering their past glory and independence, were never reconciled to the idea of paying tribute; and the men who would stoop so low as to accept the post of collecting money from their own nation, to give to the hated ruling power, were looked upon as the basest betrayers of their country. No ‘respectable’ person would have anything to do with them. It is quite evident that a calling not to be adopted by anyone who cared much for the opinion of others.

Those who engaged in it would be for the most part men who esteemed money as of more value than good reputation; being ostracised by society, they naturally degenerated. Moreover, the plan on which the tax business was conducted was calculated to make the publicans hard and grasping, and unscrupulous in their methods. The collecting of taxes was entrusted by the Romans to men who could pay out of their own pockets a fixed sum, covering all that was required from the district that was allotted to them, and they in their turn undertook to collect the sum from the people, together with as much additional as they could possibly wring from them. This of course made them hated the more. For Jesus to associate with such class of people was to show a deliberate disregard for the usages of ‘society.’

But “the common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37). Nothing sets forth in clearer lines the essential kindness and gentleness of Jesus than the fact that all the publicans and sinners voluntarily drew near to hear Him. Men of that class do not go where they are ‘preached at,’ and talked to condescendingly. Nobody, in fact, voluntarily goes into any society where he cannot be received as an equal, unless he has some selfish end in view; and this could not be the case with any who came to Jesus, since He had no money nor worldly gain of any kind to give them. They came to Him because He rendered ‘receive.’ Among the illustrations of its use we have the following expressions: ‘to let some to oneself;’ ‘to receive favourably;’ ‘to receive hospitably;’ to wait for, to expect a thing. It shows that Jesus did not merely tolerate the presence of these despised, degraded, but that He longed for them, expected them, waited for them, and welcomed them gladly when they came. They could associate with Him as freely and with as little restraint as with their own class.

Yet these sinful people did not misunderstand Jesus. They did not think that he was such an one as they were. The people knew that He was as different from them as light is from darkness, and that was just why they came to Him. They wanted that which He had, and which He wished to impart to them. While they could meet Him without any restraint, we may be sure that there was never in their interaction with Him anything of the coarseness or looseness that would characterise their association with one another. They would not feel that they must hold themselves in check while talking with Him, but they would instinctively and involuntarily drop their own rough ways, and fall in with His gentle and refined ways. This is the power of Divine goodness. Thus it is that association with Jesus changes the sinner into His image. All His true followers, and whoever lives consciously in the presence of the Lord, will inevitably be lifted out of himself, and will be made into the likeness of Christ.

The Lord loves us, and has given Himself for us. His love is real and perfect; it is His life. He gives His life for us and to us, that we may be one with Him, equal sharers of His life. This love, when it is seen and appreciated, does away with all talk or thought about inequality. We know that He is infinitely greater and wiser than we are, but that does not hinder us from coming into His presence without fear, and associating with Him on terms of equality, for “perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18). When there is true love between two persons, no thought of difference of rank or station ever enters the mind of either. If one looks upon the other as in any degree inferior, that indicates lack of perfect love; and if one thinks that the other regards him as inferior, that shows the same, and also unbelief in the reality of the love of the other. Love equalises, always lifting the inferior to the level of the superior. True love levels, by bringing up and not by casting down. Thus God, “for His great

love wherewith He loved us ... quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Why should not Christ receive sinners? Will a man not receive that which belongs to him, whenever he can get it? Indeed, there is really no question as to receiving; that is shut out by the fact that he will seek for his own. Even so Christ showed how natural it was that He should receive the sinners who flocked to hear Him. He was God's Representative. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." "The Lord He is God; it is He that made us, and His we are; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture" (Psalms 100:3). Christ is "that great Shepherd of the sheep;" "the good Shepherd." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." How then could it be otherwise than that He should come to seek the wandering sheep? No man having an hundred sheep would say, if one wandered away, 'No matter, it is only one,' and so make no effort to recover it. If he did so with one, then he would do the same with another, and another, until he would not have one left. Indifference with regard to one, shows indifference for all. It is by looking after and guarding the single ones, that he keeps the whole. Therefore by the natural action of a man with his sheep, or of a woman with that which is her dowry, Jesus justified His course in welcoming sinners to Himself.

This forever disposes of the timid sinner's objection, 'The Lord does not trouble Himself about so insignificant and worthless a being as I am.' Do you not see that, even if He had no personal love for you, His own interest demands that He seek for you until He find you? If He cannot keep the least of His flock, by what can He assure the rest that He can protect them? He has made us for His own praise; but surely there will be no praise to Him if He loses us all, and does not care. We may at once and for ever dismiss from our minds all thought of our own insignificance in this connection. In the one that is lost, the Lord sees the whole. A thing is worth what it costs, or at least a wise purchaser will make it worth what it costs him. So God will make every man whom He finds, worth what He gave for him. "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir" (Isaiah 13:12). "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The gift was great enough to purchase the world, yet the price of the world was given for each individual. Christ "loved me, and gave Himself for me." "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7). When the Lord rises upon a man, and His glory is seen upon him, no price can be set upon his value. If men will pay a fabulous price for any old article that has been handled by some famous man, what must be the worth of one who has received the touch of the Lord Almighty? We may think of ourselves in this way as worth an infinite sum, and not be made conceited by the thought, since all the value that we have or ever can have will be only the marks of the Lord's hands upon us. It is all of Him, and not of us.

In the cases referred to by the Lord, the persons had lost a part of that which represented their living. That explains their solicitude for it, and their joy on recovering it. Now just such honest, simple-hearted joy as these persons felt and manifested upon receiving their own, the Lord feels when He finds any of His own lost ones, only in as much greater degree as He is greater than any man. He is glad, and He does not attempt to conceal His joy. Often people misread Luke 15:10 as though it said that there is rejoicing among the angels of God when a sinner repents. That is no doubt true; for if "all the sons of God shouted for joy" when the world was first created, we may be sure that they have no less joy when a new creation appears; but what the text says is that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." It indicates that it is the Lord Himself who manifests and leads in the joy. He is as genuinely glad at heart as are the men who recover the lost sheep and the lost coin. What a glorious thought that even here and now we can add to the joy of heaven, and, even if we cannot sing a note, we may increase the music of heaven!

Every sinner saved adds to the harmonies of heaven a note, thus it is that "the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" is made known through the church unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Ephesians 3:10-11). Who would forego the pleasure of making the heart of God glad, and of hearing Him sing for joy? This joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). "The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty One who will save; He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17). His joy is the joy of a mighty One in His own strength, the joyful contemplation of His own work, just as when on the seventh day He rested from all His work, and delighted Himself with the sight of the perfection of the work which His hands had made. He rests in His love, and in it we may also rest, and rejoice and be glad for ever in that which He recreates.