

Sabbath School Lesson #7 – Jesus Desired Their Good – 6-12 August 2016

Christ ministered to the people, desiring their good, and poured out His life to save us. It was with great love that the Saviour cried out to His own, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37). So the Saviour would often have gathered all sinners unto Himself, cleansed off all their sin, but they would not. The Saviour loved them, and His love was the power He brought to bear upon them; but they were left free to refuse it, as they did. The same power is brought to bear upon sinners today, but they are as free to turn from it as were the Jews. Anything which interferes with this freedom to accept or refuse is not the Gospel, and does not operate in the interests of Christianity. Herein we focus on two sections: Jonah in Nineveh, and The Anyway Principle.

Jonah in Nineveh – In this section we read Jonah 3:4-4:6. Here Jonah is sent to Nineveh. "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."

The message reached the king, and he too joined the general fear. He not only joined in it, but issued a decree that the good work should go on. "For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing; let them not feed, nor drink water; but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." This was genuine repentance.

Indeed, the Saviour declared it to be so, and that these men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment and condemn the generation to whom He preached. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." We have, therefore, the testimony of Jesus that the men of Nineveh repented. The word which John the Baptist, and Jesus, and Peter, and all the apostles preached, was, "Repent." And by the action of the Ninevites, it is shown that repentance is not only in word, not only in fasting and prayer, but this with *turning every one from his evil way*, and from the violence that is in his hands. "Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well" (Isaiah 1:16). Anything short of turning from evil and of *wanting* to do better, it is of no avail until they really *do* better. And all who do so God will receive and forgive as really as He did the men of Nineveh. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not."

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." Jonah thought all his credit as a prophet was forfeited. He had told the people that the city should be destroyed, and now the Lord was not going to do it, and he was therefore "very angry." It seems that he had told the Lord as much before he left his own country; for now he says: "O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish." From this it appears that when the Lord first told Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh and cry against it, Jonah had said to Him, in substance, 'If I go up Nineveh and tell them the city shall be overthrown, they will stop sinning and turn to the Lord, and then thou wilt not overthrow it; and so if the city is not to be overthrown anyhow, I might as well stay in my own country, or anywhere else; therefore I will flee to Tarshish.' He did not think that if the city was to be destroyed anyway it was indeed useless for him to go. Jonah apparently cared more for his reputation than he did for all the souls in Nineveh, and thought that the Lord should turn a deaf ear to all the cries of the people, so that Jonah's word might be performed in spite of all.

"So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." Then the Lord prepared a gourd "that it might be a shadow over his head" from the heat; and the next day the gourd withered, and a vehement east wind "and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted," and he wished that he might die, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." "Then said the Lord, thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night; and

should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" There the record closes. Jonah made no further answer. It is queer that he could not rejoice in the mercy of God in the first place; that the wicked would not turn without warning; that unless they did turn they must perish; and that the warning alone could save them. But the Lord was patient and gentle with him, and kindly taught him the lesson which he was slow to discern. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He delighteth in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

The Anyway Principle – this section deals with the golden rule. "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). Here is a portion of Scripture with which everybody agrees, in theory. It is hardly possible that any man, no matter how opposed to Christianity, has ever found fault with this precept. However far men are from obeying it, they all agree that it is the correct principle, and that it would be a grand thing for the world if it were universally followed.

Every schoolboy knows that 'it is not fair' for one to be seeking or even quietly accepting favours from others, which he is not willing to return. The boy who seeks all good things for himself, and is not willing to do as well by anybody else, is voted 'mean.' Now it is a fact that nobody in the world likes to be ill-treated. People can endure it, but nobody would prefer to be ill-used. One who does not do the good to others that he would like to receive from them, is not acting with common fairness. "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." It is not that we should do to others as we can endure that they should do to us, nor even as we may be willing that they should do, but that we should do to them what we should like to have them do to us – what we are anxious to have done to us. And this not only to one man, but to everybody.

Recall the fact already noted, that this is universally admitted to be just and right; as being only common fairness. Now note the Saviour's comment upon this golden rule: "for this is the law and the prophets." That is, it includes all that the Scriptures require; it is Christianity. The man who does to everybody just what he would like to have everybody do to him, is a Christian. But since it is admitted that not to do so is not fair, it follows that the man who is not a Christian is not acting with common fairness. The Scriptures tell us that to serve the Lord is but our "reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). The most reasonable thing in the world is to be a Christian, a follower of Him "who went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). The one who does to all as he would like them to do to him, is a Christian; "for all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Galatians 5:14).

This does not exclude love to God, but grows out of it, because "love is of God." Only by the love of God can we love one another (1 John 4:7). And this indicates how we may do that which is seemingly impossible, namely, love our neighbour as ourselves. Christ went about doing good, because "God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). He gives freely His Holy Spirit, and all "good things" to those who ask Him, and "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). And this shows why the 'golden rule' is introduced by the word "therefore." The Saviour had just been saying that if we ask we shall receive, and had shown how willing our heavenly Father is to give "good things," even the Holy Spirit, to those who ask Him (Matthew 7:9-11; Luke 11:11-13). Parents give food and clothing to their children without being asked. So God does good, and sends rain from heaven (Acts 19:17) "on the just and on the unjust," and makes His sun "to shine on the evil and on the good" (Matthew 5:45). The free gift of God to us are ample reason why we should do good to our fellow-men (see Matthew 28:23-35); how much more, then, do they demand our service to Him from whom every good and perfect gift comes.

In His instruction to His disciples Jesus had also said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you" (Matthew 5:44). Here He gave a practical illustration of that teaching also. Not only did He reprove Peter for his act of violence to the high priest's servant, but He again showed that He came to save, and not to destroy. He was already in the hands of the mob (Mark 14:46-47), when the wound was inflicted by the zealous Peter, but He gently disengaged one hand, at the same time courteously saying, as if apologising for seeming to resist them even to do them a kindness, "Suffer ye thus far," and touched the servant's ear, and healed him. Could Divine kindness be more strikingly manifested? He is the Saviour of the world. "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 3:3).