

Sabbath School Lesson #12 – Urban Ministry *in the End Time* – 10-16 Sep 2016

Christ would have us do urban ministry. To ancient Jews, He had said, “And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace” (Jeremiah 29:7). For us in these end times, “The cities are to be worked from outposts. Said the messenger of God, ‘Shall not the cities be warned? Yes; not by God’s people living in them, but by their visiting them, to warn them of what is coming upon the earth’” (Letter 182, 1902){CL 30.2}.

How shall we work the cities? “As God’s commandment-keeping people, we must leave the cities. As did Enoch, we must work in the cities but not dwell in them” “When iniquity abounds in a nation, there is always to be heard some voice giving warning and instruction, as the voice of Lot was heard in Sodom. Yet Lot could have preserved his family from many evils, had he not made his home in this wicked, polluted city. All that Lot and his family did in Sodom could have been done by them, even if they had lived in a place some distance away from the city. Enoch walked with God, and yet he did not live in the midst of any city, polluted with every kind of violence and wickedness, as did Lot in Sodom” {CL 30.4; CL 30.5}. “We are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves in our efforts to secure country properties at a low figure, and from these outpost centers we are to work the cities” {CL 31.3}.

Mission to the cities is the initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. What do we do with our cities? “Preach the word,” brethren; “be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). The gospel of Christ has not lost its savor; it is still the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. It is adapted to urban and suburban dwellers, to all nations, tongues, and people, and to every condition and station of life. The first thing to be thought of in urban ministry and in every case is the message. In fact, we may say that the only thing that we as Seventh-day Adventists need to know is what is termed among us the third angel’s message, which is but another name for the closing up of the everlasting gospel. Paul determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2); and that was what gave him success.

Even so will it be in these days. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Romans 1:16). All men are in the same condition, having the same need; for God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26), and hath fashioned all their hearts alike (Psalm 35:15). “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), and all who believe are alike justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ. Since there is no difference in men, no matter in what part of the earth they dwell, God puts no difference between them in the matter of salvation, but purifies the hearts of all alike, by faith. What is known as the three angels’ message, closing message of the gospel, is the announcement that the Lord is soon coming, and of the power of God to prepare men for that event. “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.” “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever” (Isaiah 40:6, 8). This is the message: Man is nothing, but God is everything; man is weakness, but God is strength; man is sinful, but God is righteousness; man is ignorant, but God is wisdom; man is as frail as the grass, but God is wisdom; man is as frail as the grass, but God has life in Himself; and all that God is, He gives to every one who will accept Him; for He gave His only Son for us (John 3:16).

The message, then, is the announcement of the power of God, as contrasted with the weakness of men, and as working in weak and sinful men. It is the setting forth of the mind of Christ, and showing that as God was manifest in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, who emptied Himself that the Father alone might be revealed in Him, so He will reveal Himself in the flesh of every one who will yield Himself to God, that he may be emptied of self. Now the power of God is always the same. It cannot be measured, for it is infinite. To create the smallest thing, or to cleanse the least sin, requires nothing less than the power of God, and to create the entire universe, or to save the world, requires nothing more than that same power. All things are alike to God. Nothing is too hard for him (Jeremiah 32:17-19). With a word all things are accomplished by Him, and it requires no more effort for Him to speak the word that brings the universe into existence than to speak the word that causes of single blade of grass to grow. The same word that cast the devil out of Mary (Luke 8:2), a

Jewess, also cast the devil out of the daughter of the Syro-phenician woman (Mark 7:26-29). All treated alike. "The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Roman 10:12).

We turn to consider how much work is there to be done. "The harvest is truly great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2). Does the Saviour mean by this that the Lord of the harvest is indifferent to the needs of the field, and must be moved to take an interest in it? Not by any means; for He Himself is loudly calling, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (Isaiah 6:8). Then what does He mean by telling us to pray that He will send forth labourers into His harvest? The answer is suggested by the prayer which Isaiah, his lips burning with holy fire, uttered just after hearing the Lord's call. Isaiah said, "Here am I; send me." Isaiah had no sooner prayed thus to the Lord, than the answer came, "Go." The Lord immediately sent him forth into the harvest-field. This commission was to last "until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate" (verse 11). That is, until the end of the world. It therefore includes us. The answer which we are to expect to our prayer that the Lord of the harvest would send forth labourers, is, "Go."

Where are we to ask Him to send us? "Into the harvest," for that is what He tells us to pray for. Where is that? "The field is the world" (Matthew 13:38). Christ's parting words: "Go ye into all the world" (Mark 16:15). But you may say, 'I am ready to go, but I am waiting to find out what part of the world He wishes me to go.' What! have you not learned the prayer? It does not tell us to pray that the Lord would send us to some particular spot, but *into the harvest*, which is *the world*. Well, you are there now, are you not? Then if you have a mind to work your prayer is answered. What shall you do? – "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do."

It is a strange idea that many have, that they must get away from where they are, in order to be missionaries in the Lord's harvest-field. People who live in the United Kingdom, or in any other country, are in the world just as much as they would be if they should cross the ocean. The same principle that would make it necessary for them to leave the place where they are, in order to enter the harvest-field, would oblige them to leave any other place where they might be located. Thus they would continually be moving, accomplishing nothing.

He who cannot work for the Lord where he is now, will certainly not be able to work for Him in any other place where he may be. Moving from one place to another does not make one a missionary. A man may have travelled round the world, and still not be a missionary. It is evident that what a man is in his native land, he will be in any other land. Yes, the Lord may call one to leave his native land to be a missionary in a foreign land, but to do nothing where one is now and keep waiting to go in other places is not of the Lord. He who does the work of the Lord where he is now, is likely to keep doing that work if duty calls him to other places. To be a missionary in the harvest-field is to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16); "to do all things without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life" (Philippians 2:14-15).

Work the cities but live not in cities. "If we place ourselves under objectionable influences, can we expect God to work a miracle to undo the results of our wrong course? – No, indeed. Get out of the cities as soon as possible, and purchase a little piece of land, where you can have a garden, where your children can watch the flowers growing, and learn from them lessons of simplicity and purity." "When the power invested in kings is allied to goodness, it is because the one in responsibility is under the divine dictation. When power is allied with wickedness, it is allied to Satanic agencies, and it will work to destroy those who are the Lord's property. The Protestant world have set up an idol sabbath in the place where God's Sabbath should be, and they are treading in the footsteps of the Papacy. For this reason I see the necessity of the people of God moving out of the cities into retired country [places,] where they may cultivate the land and raise their own produce. Thus they may bring their children up with simple, healthful habits. I see the necessity of making haste to get all things ready for the crisis." "The time has come, when, as God opens the way, families should move out of the cities. The children should be taken into the country. The parents should get as suitable a place as their means will allow. Though the dwelling may be small, yet there should be land in connection with it, that may be cultivated" {CL 17.3; CL 21.1; CL 24.2}.