

Sabbath School Lesson #5 – Curse the Day – 22-28 Oct 2016

Christ would have us learn to give thanks in everything. Oh that through it all, we may say: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11)! As we learn to be thankful even in afflictions, we need to know that nothing comes upon any child of God except what He sends or permits. When Satan was given permission to plague Job, the patriarch accepted it as from the Lord, and said, when moved to complain: "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10).

Writing about afflictions, Ellen White noted: "Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement – days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God's providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being" {PK 162.1}.

About Job, Ellen White wrote: "The faithful Job, in the day of his affliction and darkness, declared: 'Let the day perish wherein I was born.' 'O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, And my calamity laid in the balances together!' 'O that I might have my request; And that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; That He would let loose His hand, and cut me off! Then should I yet have comfort.' 'I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.' 'My soul chooseth ... death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live alway: Let me alone; For my days are vanity.' Job 3:3; 6:2, 8-10; 7:11, 15, 16." {PK 162.2}.

And then explains how the Lord attended Job: "But though weary of life, Job was not allowed to die. To him were pointed out the possibilities of the future, and there was given him the message of hope: 'Thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear: Because thou shalt forget thy misery, And remember it as waters that pass away: And thine age shall be clearer than the noonday; Thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, Because there is hope... Thou shalt lie down, And none shall make thee afraid; Yea, many shall make suit unto thee. But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, And they shall not escape, And their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost.' Job 11:15-20." {PK 163.1}.

As to how Job came through it all, Ellen White says: "From the depths of discouragement and despondency Job rose to the heights of implicit trust in the mercy and the saving power of God. Triumphant he declared: 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: ... He also shall be my salvation.' 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, And that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, Yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, And mine eyes shall behold, and not another.' Job 13:15, 16; 19:25-27." {PK 163.2}. "The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind" (Job 38:1), and revealed to His servant the might of His power. When Job caught a glimpse of his Creator, he abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes. Then the Lord was able to bless him abundantly and to make his last years the best of his life." {PK 164.1}.

Knowing all we know of the affliction of Job, how should we respond to afflictions today? We are told: "Be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit ... giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:18-20).

Most people, even professed Seventh-day Adventist Christians, would think this rather a hard matter. We are familiar with the exhortation, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and are, able to adjust ourselves to it. Of course we can in everything give thanks that things are no worse than they are; for no one except Christ has drank of the dregs of the cup of suffering. We may have learned how, even in the deepest of afflictions and severest trials, to thank God for the promise of His presence and salvation; but to give thanks always for all things, is a lesson that is not usually learned until one has passed through many experiences of bitter trial.

In Ephesians 5:18-20 there are two admonitions. One is, not to be drunken with wine; the other is to give thanks always for all things; and while the first seems the easier, the second is no less a Christian duty, or privilege. ‘All things’ is a term admitting no exceptions. Passing by the comforts and easily recognised blessings which are commonly named as calling for thanksgiving, we have hardships, which are, equally with the others, included in the “all things” for which thanks is to be given to God. Loss of property, or poverty on account of inability to obtain employment, calls for thanksgiving to God. For that which is infinitely more crushing – loss of our loved ones, – we must give thanks. Are we misunderstood, maligned, even persecuted! – for this cause also we must thank God. Even for the bonds of “affliction and iron” and the darkness and shadow of death that come down upon us as the result of our own folly and transgression, we are always to give thanks to God. How can we do it?

We can always be thankful only by knowing that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Romans 8:28). It cannot be done as a matter of duty, for thanksgiving must be as spontaneous as the songs of the birds. Real thanksgiving comes from a heart so full of a sense of gratitude that the most natural and the only thing to do is to express it.

In order to thank God for trials and afflictions, we must know that “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6) – it is so even if we trace our trouble to our own transgressions, for chastisement from a loving parent (and, “God is love” (1 John 4:8)) is not a token of anger. And we must never forget that whoever or whatever may be the means of our affliction, it comes from God or He permits. If it is the means of teaching us obedience, is it not a valid reason for thanksgiving! We may not see any reason why we are afflicted; Job did not for a long time, but the end demonstrated “that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:11). Hezekiah had served God “in truth and with a perfect heart” (Isaiah 38:3), and yet when he was left to himself he revealed things in his heart of which he was ignorant; but God knew them. The same was the case with Job, and affliction was necessary to make him know himself so as to abhor himself (Job 42:6), and to know God as he could not know Him in the time of unbroken prosperity.

“Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed” – it does not disappoint us, and therefore we can “glory in tribulations also” (Romans 5:3). It may seem to us that the tribulations are altogether out of proportion to that which was lacking. For instance, Job was already “perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1), – why should he need to suffer so much?

Simply because the lesson could not be learned with less. God desires that we should be “perfect and entire, wanting in nothing” (James 1:4), and when we know that only “divers temptations” can accomplish this result, we shall count them “all joy” (James 1:2), and give thanks for every one that brings us into closer communication with our loving Father.

Afflictions are necessary to fit us for service. “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation [even though our transgressions have brought them upon us], that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Unthankfulness is that which transformed men who once knew God into heathen (see Romans 1:21-23), and thankfulness for all things the recognition of God in all things, – will change a heathen into a Christian. How essential, then, that they whose lifework is to make known “the God of all comfort” to the heathen should have learned this lesson, in which one never can be proficient without undergoing suffering. And how foolish to complain or to be discouraged over that which in God’s hands can work nothing but good! Learning from the afflictions of Job, let us then welcome each rebuff that turns earth’s smoothness rough, each sting that bids not to sit nor stand, but go.

Every moan of pain, and cry of need, is heard by God. He is touched with the needs of His creatures. He is the only One who can supply these needs, and so every cry of trouble is a cry to Him. He told Job that the young ravens “cry unto God” for their food, “the young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God” (Job 38:39-41; Psalms 104:21). He who hears ravens and lions will surely hear the cry of His children who are in trouble! Let us keep a song in our hearts: “Through it all, through it all, I’ve learned to trust in Jesus, I’ve learned to trust in God; Through it all, through it all, I’ve learned to depend upon His Word.”