

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – Suffering for Christ – 29 April-5 May 2017

Christ is not only an example but the very life of a true Christian. Peter says, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). And Christ is the only one who has the power to live that kind of life in human flesh today. We may not only walk with Him, but “in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28) our feet stepping in His footprints evenly with Him; and we “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:8).

All young animals learn by mimicry, – by imitating their parents. This is the way that the little birds learn to fly, and the baby ducks to swim. But the reason why they can follow the example of their parents, and imitate them, is because they are their own young ones, – they have the same nature. The little chickens could never learn to swim, no matter how hard they might try to follow the example of the ducks and swans. And so it is only *the children of God*, those who have His own nature, who can copy the example, and be and do as He is and does. “What things soever He doeth, these *the son* also doeth in like manner” (John 5:19). We are to be imitators of Him as His dear children. So it is not enough for us to see the example, to learn what Jesus did, and then try to imitate Him. We must have His Divine nature before we can copy His example and do like Him. We can get this only by the gift of His own Holy Spirit. Like His people of old, we can make all things like the pattern only by being filled with His own Holy Spirit, and this He has promised to give to all who ask Him.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (James 1:2). Count, that is, consider, believe, that all sorts of temptations are joy; and do not doubt it for a moment. Count it joy when you “fall into” them as into a trap. The encounter will without doubt reveal some things in your character and disposition that you never knew before; but do not be discouraged; the Lord is not discouraged at the prospect, and He sees much more than you do. Count it *all joy*; not merely that all of the trial is joy, but that the trial is the fulness of joy. All the joy of the world to come is gained only through trial. It is through much tribulation that we enter into the kingdom of heaven. It was for “the joy that was set before Him” that our Lord Jesus Christ “endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2).

Now it is quite contrary to our usual custom to rejoice in tribulation; much less is the one who wishes to be a Christian inclined to rejoice at the prospect or the reality of all sorts of temptations; therefore it is well to study the case closely, to find out why we are to count temptations joy, and how we can do it. The Apostle Paul had a good deal of experience in this line. A messenger was sent direct from Satan to plague him, and he requested the Lord to remove the trial; but the Lord replied, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore Paul exclaimed: “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches [injuries], in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (1 Corinthians 12:9-10). What is the secret?

The secret of joy in temptation is the knowledge that one is sharing it with Christ. Read the words of Peter: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13). Still more strongly is it put in 1 Peter 1:5-8, where, speaking of “the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time,” the apostle adds: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” It should be understood that in the Lord’s presence there is fullness of joy, and that there is no suffering without Him.

Christ’s very presence is joy; therefore suffering, trial, fierce temptations, are a cause for great rejoicing, since they ensure His presence. Christ “hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:15), and He is not a fair-weather friend. Many think that there is no suffering with Christ unless one is persecuted for righteousness’ sake. They do not think that temptations, and suffering which one brings on himself by a wrong-doing, is suffering

with Christ; yet so it is. Was He not tempted in all points like as we are? and did He not suffer, being tempted? Thus we must know that not a temptation comes to us that does not first touch Him. Indeed, it comes through Him to us; for "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; ... that the blessing of Abraham might come on" us (Galatians 3:13-14). If we do not recognise Him in the temptation, it is not the same to us as if He were not present, and we get only the wounds and bruises and the heaviness; but if we remember that nothing can come to us apart from Him; that it is in the Cross that we touch Him, and are made partakers of His life; every sharp thrust will only cause us joy, and not sorrow; it will the least of all not arouse feelings of bitterness. What a different world this would be, even now with all the curse, the trials, the injustice, the oppression, if people could but know the value of Christ's presence, and that in all their affliction He is afflicted; that He Himself bears the sins, the sickness, and the sorrow of the world. Songs and rejoicing would be heard, and sorrow and sighing would indeed flee away. The knowledge of His presence bearing all things has always caused martyrs to sing for very joy in the midst of the flames.

But we are told that "every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed;" shall we count that joy? Most certainly; for the Lord is with us then as well as at any other time. Mind, that to be tempted, even when drawn of our own lusts, and enticed, is not in itself sin. We need not consent when sinners entice us, even though the enticer be our own sinful flesh; for Christ has power over all flesh; and the joy of the temptation comes in seeing and experiencing Christ's mastery over sin in the flesh. Ah, what exquisite joy there is in victory! and the fiercer and stronger the foe the keener the joy; and that joy may be ours continually, for Christ has gained the victory for all mankind, and He is with us to the end.

If we revert to the title of this week's Lesson, "Suffering for Christ", we would prefer it was rewritten to read: Suffering with Christ. This accords well with what Scripture teach us. We suffer with Him, and "If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:17). "For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). Suffering with Christ means enduring temptation with Him. The suffering is that which comes in the struggle against sin. Self-inflicted suffering amounts to nothing. It is not honour to the satisfying of the flesh (Colossians 2:23). Christ did not torture Himself in order to gain the approval of the Father. But when we suffer with Christ, then we are made perfect in Him. The strength by which he resisted the temptations of the enemy is the strength by which we are to overcome. His life in us gains the victory.

"In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isaiah 63:9). It is a blessed thing to know that there is not a human sorrow that the Lord does not share; not a single ache or pain that He does not feel. He is "touched with the feelings of our infirmities." This knowledge is enough of itself to lighten the heaviest load, and ease the severest pain. It is through the acceptance of this truth, the realising of it, that we are healed of our diseases of soul and body. Faith makes it a fact that it is not we that live, but that Christ lives in us, and so real is this, that He bears all our ills, while we go free.

The apostle Paul says, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Philippians 3:10). To "the fellowship of His sufferings," we have not by any means learned all that suffering is designed to teach us, when we have learned that Christ suffered for us, to redeem us from sin and suffering. The fellowship of His sufferings means far more than that we may divide the pain with Him, or throw it all upon Him. He suffered not for Himself. "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases." "Surely He hath borne our sicknesses, and carried our sorrows." "By His stripes we are healed." The suffering of Christ is the healing of others.

And if we share the fellowship of His suffering, every affliction that comes upon us, will be used by us for the lightening of some other person's affliction. We shall study the cause of it, and learn God's way of healing it, in order that we may be prepared to help anybody else out of similar trouble. The more we have affliction, provided we bear it with Christ, the more of a blessing we shall be, and we shall "glory in tribulations also." Then "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, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).