

Sabbath School Lesson #10 – The Third Missionary Journey – 1-7 September 2018

Christ is with us, He bids us not be moved from His mission by tribulations and trials, and that we may say as Paul: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).

Sunday: Ephesus: Part 1 – Paul understood the importance of the Spirit. When Paul came to Ephesus, and there found certain disciples, the first question that he asked them – the first thing he said to them after the customary greeting – was, “Have ye receive the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” (Acts 19:2). They had not heard of the Holy Spirit, knowing only John’s baptism. Paul explained that there was something beyond John’s baptism, – that the object of John’s baptism had come in the Lord Jesus, who had ascended again to heaven, and had solicited His Father to send “forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts” (Galatians 4:6), into the hearts of all believers in Jesus, who are buried and risen from the dead through baptism. “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them” (Acts 19:5-6).

Thus in Paul’s mission, as a minister of the gospel, his first inquiry was: have ye received the Holy Spirit? Thus the first work of the visiting minister was to see that they had received the Holy Spirit. That is how it was in the time of the former rain. We are “in the time of the latter rain,” which is to be more abundant than was the former. How much more abundantly, then, is it now the proper inquiry of true ministers of the gospel everywhere, first of all, “did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” and the first thing of all in the work of the ministry to see that they have received the Holy Spirit. These things were all written for us.

Let us ask the Lord for His Spirit. It is His will to give us His Spirit, just for asking. “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him” (1 John 5:14-15). You ask according to His will in asking for His Spirit. Having asked, you know you have received, for He says so. Then thank Him, and continue to thank Him, that you have received His Spirit. How you may *feel* has nothing to do with it; not how you feel, but what *He says*: “Ask, and it shall be given you;” “Receive ye the Holy Ghost;” and “Be filled with the Spirit” (Luke 11:9; John 20:22; Ephesians 5:18).

Monday: Ephesus: Part 2 – In the first century, Ephesus was the capital of Asia Minor, and the centre of trade from both the east and the west. It was a place of paganism, and a stronghold of popular education of the world, when, soon after the death of the Saviour, it was first visited by the apostles. Side by side with the Greeks, dwelt Jews, men who ought to have held aloft the worship of Jehovah, but who had lost the Spirit by mingling with the idol worshipers. It was into this city, restless and turbulent and easily wrought upon, that Paul, as a missionary, went to preach of a risen Saviour. He met with difficulties. Opposed on one side by science, falsely so called, and on the other side by a religion which had the form of godliness, but which had lost the power thereof, Paul offered the crucified Son of God. His preaching was attended by miracles. In the synagogue of the Jews, he reasoned three months concerning “the kingdom of God;” and when men hardened their hearts against the Word, he entered the school of Tyrannus, where he taught for two years with such power that the Word of the Lord Jesus went abroad throughout all Asia, among both Jews and Greeks. The Greeks were scholars, and exalted the power of intellectual culture. Paul, as a Christian missionary, first taught in the synagogue, then in the schools, where the Gospel of Jesus Christ was offered in place of the philosophy of Plato, whom the Greeks deified. Said he, “The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” So powerful was this teaching of the apostle that many who owned books of sorcery, or magic, which passed for wisdom in the eyes of the world, brought their books and burned them before all men. Students from this school of Tyrannus became earnest workers in Asia Minor, and through them the Gospel was made known. Not only was the learning of the Greeks, who were the intellectual lights of the world, opposed by Paul and his disciples, but

the trades were affected; so much so that there was an uprising of the people, who with one voice cried, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Diana, the patron goddess of Ephesus, was a personification of fecundity. In this city, Christianity – the power of God unto salvation – came in open and bitter conflict with the false religion and the false education of the world.

Tuesday: Troas – When Paul was at Troas, we are told in Acts 20:7: "And upon the *first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread*, Paul preached unto them, and continued his speech until midnight." Was the Sabbath changed to Sunday by this? Paul had been with the church there an entire week (Acts 20:6). If anyone thinks that Paul spent seven days with the church in Troas, and did not hold a meeting until just before he started away, he has read the life of Paul to little purpose. If Paul did not hold a meeting every day he was there, he did differently from his ordinary custom (see Acts 19:8-10). We have the record of only one meeting with the church at Troas, and when did that take place? "On the first day of the week." But on what part of the first day of the week was it? It was in the night, for they had "many lights," and it is plainly stated that the meeting lasted all night. But according to Scripture reckoning, the day begins and ends at sunset (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13; Deut. 16:6; Lev. 23:32). The first day of the week, then, begins at sunset Saturday evening, and ends at sunset of the following evening. Therefore a night meeting on the first day of the week must be held on Saturday evening, and that is just when the meeting was held which is recorded in Acts 20:7-11. Then having held this meeting in the night of the first day of the week, what did Paul do in the day-time? Luke tells that he departed when it was light, and travelled on foot to Assos. To be consistent, Sunday keepers must hold their meetings in the dark part of the first day of the week, and never in the day-time on Sunday, for the Bible contains no account of a religious meeting on Sunday in the day-time. The meeting at Troas is the only recorded instance of a meeting on the first day of the week, even so in the night.

Wednesday: Miletus – When Paul was on his last journey to Jerusalem, "from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17). We read the verses following, which contain the substance of his talk to them, until we come to verse 28, where we read, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Here we learn that the elders are shepherds, charged with the duty of feeding the flock. Paul says that the Spirit has made them overseers to the flock – of course Paul knew well that "the Lord is that Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17) – it is Christ who made them overseers. An overseer is one who is over. The word overseer is the literal rendering of the Greek word; from which comes our word 'episcopal,' which means 'pertaining to a bishop.' We read: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 5:1-4). Let elders heed these exhortations of apostles.

Thursday: Tyre and Caesarea – Paul's whole soul was wrapped up in Christ, and in the desire to see His cause advanced. When the brethren tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem, where he was seized by enemies, he said to them, "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). And a little before that, while he was upon the same journey, he had said: "And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:22-24).

Paul was not thinking of any gain to himself, but only of the gain to Christ. His only desire was that Christ should be magnified, whether it was by his life or by his death. For he knew that whenever he should die, it would be the death of a martyr, and that therefore the cause of Christ would be glorified thereby. This is the loyalty of the true soldier of Christ in all his conflicts with the enemy, in all calls of duty. This is the loyalty of the soldiers of Christ now.