

Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Intimations of Hope – 19-25 Nov 2016

Christ is our salvation and hope. “He also *shall be* my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before Him” (Job 13:16). “The riches of the grace of Christ must be kept before the mind. Treasure up the lessons that His love provides. Let your faith be like Job’s, that you may declare, ‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.’ Lay hold on the promises of your Heavenly Father, and remember His former dealings with you and with His servants; for ‘all things work together for good to them that love God.’” {RH Oct 20, 1910}.

Let every sufferer know, “to all the living there is hope” (Ecclesiastes 9:4). To have hope while suffering is to trust in Christ as the rightful King of the universe. Our part, therefore, is to say to Him, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). We are to say, ‘Lord, I belong to Thee; I recognise Thy right to reign in me, and I give Thee full liberty to have Thine own way, to live Thy perfect life in me; live in this earthly temple just as Thou dost in Thy sanctuary in the heavens.’ True hope calls for right living.

The question of hope resulting from right living is whether we will have our way or let God have His way. If we insist on having our own way, it is certain that right living will not follow.

The heart of man is very deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9), and prone to have its own way. There is nothing more natural than for a person to think he knows better what is best for him than God does. Of course it is not anything bad that he wants; it is something good and desirable, and he has the best of reasons for wanting it. But that which is good and desirable in itself, may or may not be suited to the circumstances of the individual desiring it. His desire for it is based on the assumption that just the right time and circumstances exist in his case for what he seeks, – an assumption which only the possession of superhuman wisdom could justify.

King Hezekiah, one of the best kings of Judah, was at one time “sick unto death,” and received word from the Lord by the prophet Isaiah that he should “die and not live.” For king Hezekiah, however, he did not wish to die, but thought it would be better for him to live; and he “wept sore” and prayed that he might live. He expressed his reasons for desiring to live. “I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said, I shall not see the LORD, even the LORD, in the land of the living.” “The grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth” (Isaiah 38:10-11, 18). Certainly, if reason can ever show a better way than the one indicated in the word of the Lord, it was so in the case of Hezekiah.

The Lord heard Hezekiah’s prayer, and sent word that his life should be prolonged fifteen years. But these fifteen years added nothing to Hezekiah, but rather took from the lustre of his reign. For we read that “Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up; therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 32:25). Also “in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land [in causing the sun to return ten degrees backward], God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart” (verse 31). And Hezekiah died, leaving on the throne a son that had been born to him during the added fifteen years; and thus the wicked reign of Manasseh followed.

If only Hezekiah had accepted God’s initial word! It is never safe, even with apparently the best of motives and of reasons, to seek our own way in opposition to the word of the Lord. The only place any person can afford to be in is the place where God puts him; and when in His providence the time comes, if it does, that we are to be put in the grave, it will not be wise for us to prefer and seek life in preference to death. The talk of wisdom is: “Thy will, not mine, be done” (Luke 22:42); “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15)

But such faith as Job had is often lacking with most Christians. The old phrase of being under the clouds is a common complaint with most Christians. Such testimonies as this are common: ‘I enjoyed so much of the blessing of God a few days ago, and felt such peace in my heart, but lately I have been under a cloud.’ And the poor souls mourn and despond as though the Lord had lost all interest in them, and they could have no more confidence in the Lord until He should remove that cloud. We ought to feel sorry for such Christians, for they are making trouble for themselves, depriving themselves of the great blessings, neglecting work that they ought to be doing for the Master, and dishonoring God by doubting Him.

Nature ought to teach us, in regard to clouds, even dark clouds that bring rain, that the person who should say on a cloudy day that the sun had entirely ceased to shine, would be thought to have very little knowledge of the nature of the sun. So the person who thinks that God's love ceases every time a little gloom comes over the mind, either resulting from our faults or Satan's malice, shows but little knowledge of the character of God. The psalmist says: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psalms 90:1-2). And the apostle describes our Saviour as "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). If God's love has been manifested toward us, we may be sure that a passing cloud cannot drive away that love. If He loved us yesterday, He loves us today. Listen to the words of the beloved disciple:

"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, *He loved them unto the end*" (John 13:1); we are graven on His palms (Isaiah 49:16)!

All suffering is like passing clouds. To be frightened at the shadow of a passing cloud is an evidence of lack of faith in God. 'But I do not feel near to God at such times,' says one, 'I feel just as though God was angry with me, and I dare not look up to him.' That is just the trouble; you do not *feel*. When you *felt* the smile of God resting upon you, you trusted in that feeling, and not in the love and promise of God. Know that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17). Nothing but sin can separate a soul from God. Even sin does not drive God away; it is simply that by which we take ourselves away from Him. If the cloud is caused by sins committed, we know it; and knowing it, we know how to remove it. But if you are not conscious of having committed any sin that would bring darkness, then let your faith hold onto the promise of God. Know that God has not changed.

Be thankful always. "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High" (Psalm 92:1). The failure to thank God for mercies received, often brings darkness. It was a lack of thankfulness that made men heathen. "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was *darkened*" (Romans 1:21). When people feel peculiarly happy, they are ready to exclaim with the psalmist: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad" (Psalm 34:1-2). But they forget all about their resolution just as soon as their good *feeling* passes away. Instead of that, when clouds come, they should bring sunshine again by their praises to God. It is by simple faith, not by feeling, that we know the love of God. It is impossible for us to feel the love of God, unless we have appropriated it by faith. It is faith that makes it real to us, so that we may feel it.

How can anybody doubt God? Has not Christ died? Let us ponder the apostle Paul's question: And if God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things" (Romans 8:32)? What greater assurance can we ask for? Oh, that all might have such simple faith in God that they would take Him just at His word, trusting Him as fully in the darkness as in the light, knowing that the darkness and the light are both alike to God. Then they could say with the prophet: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

That is true faith. It was such faith as Job had when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). When everything is clear, there is no call for faith; but when the clouds hang low, shutting out the beacon light, then faith that makes the darkness even as the noonday, is the faith that overcomes the world. And why should we not have such faith, since Paul, who had every opportunity to make a careful calculation of the matter, says:

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39); for we are graven upon the palms of His hands (Isaiah 49:16)!