

Sabbath School Lesson #1 – The Person of Peter – 25-31 March 2017

Christ would have us grow in faith, as He encouraged Peter to do. We read: “But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth *His* hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matthew 14:30-31).

Sunday: Depart From Me! – When Peter, in his boat on the Sea of Galilee, saw the power of Jesus over the sea and its inhabitants, he fell down before the Lord, saying, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). It was the same realization of holiness that prompted Isaiah, when he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, to exclaim, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

It is worthy of note, also, that both those men, Isaiah and Peter, who thus confessed their sinfulness, were at once accepted as workers. To Peter, the Lord said, “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men,” literally, “thou shalt be catching men alive.” But Peter had to be converted before he could strengthen the brethren; and likewise the coal from off the altar had to touch the lips of Isaiah, and purge his sin, before he could say, “Here am I; send me,” to the call “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” and could be told, “Go.”

Herein is hope and a wondrous calling for every sinner. Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He receives and saves sinners, and then, having received them into His confidence, He sends them forth as His representatives, to carry His message of mercy to other sinners. He takes us as associates with Him. He was made flesh, and took the nature of fallen humanity, in order to save men; and so He commits the work not to angels, but to those who have felt the power of the sins that oppress those to whom they are sent. To thus work with Christ is the highest honour that the universe can bestow.

Monday: Confessing the Christ – Christ promises to those who overcome that He will confess their names before His Father and before His angels (Revelation 3:5). This does not mean merely that in the judgment the Saviour will acknowledge that He knows the man whose name is called, but He will answer to the name as to His own. He has fully identified Himself with His people, so that they stand as His representatives on earth, and He appears for them in heaven. They are to be so entirely one with Him that His name can fitly rest upon them, and He will not be ashamed to bear theirs. “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

We would think naturally that Christ would be ashamed to have us bearing His name before our fellows, but if we are not ashamed to confess Him, He will see that there is no cause for shame. “He is not ashamed to call them brethren” whom He sanctifies (Hebrews 2:11), and “whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 9:33). “In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion” (Psalm 71:1). If we had undertaken presumptuously to set forth the character of the Lord, we might well fear to be put to shame, but it is the Lord who has chosen to reveal Himself in us, and He will justify the putting of His name upon us. He has formed us, and He says to us: “show forth My praise” (Isaiah 43:21).

Tuesday: Walking on Water – The Bible sets forth Jesus as “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). That word not only has power to uphold, but “is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). An instance of the upholding power of Christ’s word is given in Matthew 14:25-32. The disciples were on the raging sea, when they were astonished to see Jesus walking on the water. Jesus having reassured them, “Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid,” Peter said, “Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said unto him, Come.”

Peter at once responded to the word “Come,” and “walked on the water to go to Jesus.” Some might hastily suppose that it was the water that held Peter up; but a little reflection will show that it was not so. It is contrary to nature for water to hold a man up; and, moreover, we read that when Peter “saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.” Jesus caught him, saying, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” If it had been the water that was supporting him, he would not have sunk; for the water was just the same where he sunk as it was where he walked. So when we

remember the words of Jesus, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" We know that when Peter walked on the water, it was the word of Jesus that supported him. It was the word "Come" that brought him, and it was only when he distrusted that word that he began to go down.

Those who have neglected to take the word of the Lord as applying to them personally, will not accept that word, "Come," as applying to them. Only those who recognise that every time the Lord speaks He speaks to them, will be able to take that word to themselves. In the second Advent, the waiting ones will be those who have lived on the word of Christ, so that at the word "Come," they will, as the most natural thing in the world, go to meet the Lord. Happy are they who know the sustaining power of the word, and to take it all to themselves.

Wednesday: Denying His Lord – When Christ was in the judgment hall, the night before His crucifixion, Peter denied Him with cursing and swearing, saying, "I know not the man" (Luke 22:55-62). Then "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter," and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, that He should deny Him thrice, "and Peter went out, and wept bitterly." That look converted Peter. Fifty days later, at Pentecost, Peter stood up before the multitude and boldly preached Jesus. He charged the death of Jesus upon the people, yet with such love and tenderness that they were converted. The threats of the rulers were not able to cause him to waver in the least. What could have made so marvellous a change in so short a time? Nothing but the look of the Lord. We may be sure that Peter never forgot that look. During that fifty days he had been living in the light of that look; and all his life long the knowledge of the love that was conveyed to him by it, must have been to him an inspiration. What the Lord did for Peter, He will do for us. He says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). "Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause Thy face to shine; and we shall be saved" (Psalm 80:19).

Thursday: Peter as Church Leader – Was Peter the Church Leader? In the fifth chapter of Peter's first epistle we find his testimony on the subject, which is the testimony of Christ, who put the words in Peter's mouth. He says: "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).

Those whom Peter addressed were "elders;" he was "also an elder." He stood on a level with them. They were charged to "feed the flock of God," "taking the oversight thereof." This was all that Peter was commissioned to do; they as well as he were shepherds of the flock. And the "chief shepherd" is plainly declared to be Jesus Christ, He who "shall appear," and at whose appearing crowns of glory will be given to the faithful. And the testimony of Paul is explicit. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Hebrews 13:20).

A claim that Peter was the apostolic Church Leader is contrary to Peter's testimony, and contradicts Christ, for Peter spoke only as the mouthpiece of the Spirit of Christ that was in him. All the holy men of old "spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (1 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 1:21). Such claim also invokes a spirit that regards Peter as foundation of the Church.

"The head of every man is Christ.' God, who put all things under the Saviour's feet, 'gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.' 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22, 23. The church is built upon Christ as its foundation; it is to obey Christ as its head. It is not to depend upon man, or be controlled by man. Many claim that a position of trust in the church gives them authority to dictate what other men shall believe and what they shall do. This claim God does not sanction. The Saviour declares, 'All ye are brethren.' All are exposed to temptation, and are liable to error. Upon no finite being can we depend for guidance. The Rock of faith is the living presence of Christ in the church. Upon this the weakest may depend, and those who think themselves the strongest will prove to be the weakest, unless they make Christ their efficiency. 'Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.' The Lord 'is the Rock, His work is perfect.' 'Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.' Jeremiah 17:5; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 2:12" {DA 414.3}. Christ is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).