

Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Offerings of Gratitude – 24 February–2 March 2018

Christ would have us know that our God, His Father, is a giving God. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Our Lesson study this week is taken from: Matthew 6:19-21; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Peter 4:10; Luke 7:37-47; and 2 Corinthians 8:8-15; 9:6-7.

Sunday: “Where Your Treasure Is” – By the failing of some banks in the recent global financial crisis, some people lost some of their money. People, who had saved in those banks money for their old age, saw their hard-earned savings significantly reduced. ‘How foolish,’ you say, ‘Why did they not put their money in a *reliable* bank?’ That is just what they thought they were doing, but they saw, when it is too late, that they were mistaken. And are not you and I in danger of making the same mistake if we trust in earthly banks? The Lord of heaven and earth says, and He surely is in a position where He ought to know, – the Lord says that there is only one bank in the universe where we can put our treasures and *know* that they are perfectly safe, – and that is the Bank of Heaven. He says, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.”

The Lord gives us the reason why we should lay them up there: “For where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” The Lord yearns for our hearts, and He knows that our hearts always follow our treasures. He often allows our faith in earthly banks to be severely shaken, and then He counsels us to lay our treasures up where they will be safe. He knows that unless our faith in earthly places of safety is shaken we shall be content to leave both our treasures and our hearts here, and He knows that will mean for us not only temporal ruin, but eternal ruin. Can we not in this also see His great love? He says, “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:12). He knows, and wants us to know, that heavenly things alone are enduring.

But how can we lay up our treasures in heaven? Heaven is so far away, we are apt to think. But Jesus makes it very plain in His answer to the young man, in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew, and twenty-first verse: “Jesus said unto them, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have *treasure in heaven*; and come and follow Me.” Again in Luke He says: “Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourself bags which wax not old, a *treasure in the heavens* that faileth not, were no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.” In 1 Timothy 6:17-19 we read: “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; *laying up in store* for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”

We may learn a lesson from the bird. One year it began to build on the lower branches of the tree. It hastily gathered the strings and hairs and straws and wove them into its tiny house. By and by the charming house was finished, the bird laid in it her little eggs and hatched the young. How proud she was! What songs floated out from the old tree! and how busily she worked that she might provide a good breakfast for her little family. But one morning the nest was empty. A few scattered feathers told the tale. The cat had destroyed the old bird and all her treasures! What was the matter? Do you not see? She had put her treasures *too low down*, builded *too near the earth*.

Now God looks down to-day and sees us who have minds with which to reason, – He sees some of us beginning to have treasures upon the earth; He sees us planning, and building all our hopes on having pleasures here, on getting rich, on having great earthly wisdom, or a great name among our friends, just as though we always were going to live here. His great heart of love aches as He sees it. He longs to save us from the trouble that *must* be ours if we build so low down. He allows some of our treasures to be taken to show us the danger, and then He cries out, ‘Build higher! O build higher! If you have your treasures so low down, they will be stolen, or spoilt, or destroyed. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Look up, My child, look up! Here you may send up your treasures and they will be enduring. Here are everlasting mansions that I am preparing for you, will you let Me write down your name? will you have them? Here is a dazzling crown that when once received no man can take from you. Here are riches eternal and that fadeth not away. Will you have them?’ God help us to send our treasures. Then we shall be safe, for we shall want to go where our treasures are.

Monday: Stewards of the Grace of God – “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and

dominion for ever and ever" (1 Peter 4:10-11). The gift which we have received is the gift of grace, and we have received it freely and abundantly; and as we have received it, so are we to minister the same to others. "No man liveth to himself." We have received the gift, not for our own exclusive benefit, but only as stewards, that we may as freely distribute it as we have received it. This is in harmony with our Lord's injunction to the twelve when he sent them out the first time: "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). Of course we cannot of ourselves impart to others the grace of God; but we can become workers together with God by making known to others that which we have heard and seen and received. As ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech men by us, we are to pray them, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). The command of our Lord is, "And let him that heareth say, Come" (Revelations 22:17).

One of the ways in which we can work with Christ in discharging our debt to the world, is by giving of our means. This is in the direct line of Peter's injunction to minister to others the grace of Christ, which we have received, for the apostle Paul says: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). He counted not the riches and glory of heaven a prize to be grasped and held for His own use, although they were His by right; but He divested Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant (Philippians 2:4-7). Jesus gave all the wealth of heaven for the redemption of the world. He became poor, that He might make others rich. He was under no obligation to do this; but we who have received the gift, and who have nothing that we have not received (John 15:5; 1 Corinthians 4:7), owe all we have to Christ; and since He has given Himself and all that He possessed to the world, it follows that what we owe to Christ we owe to the world. We give to Christ by giving to carry the message of His grace to the world. That we owe all that we have is evident from the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price;" that price being "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). If we are not our own, then of course nothing that we have is our own. All that we have we owe, in Christ, to the world, that they may learn of the riches of His grace. There was a time in the history of the church when not one of the members said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own (see Acts 4:31-33); and that was a time of great power in proclaiming the message, and of wonderful growth in the church, because "great grace was upon them all." If every one who professes to be Christ's in these days would consider that neither he nor his property is his own, but that he owes all to Christ and to His last message to the world, might we not expect that the message would be given with great power? We may be poor in this world's goods, yet this does not relieve us from responsibility. We have on record for our example the churches in Macedonia, "How that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Even beyond their power they were willing of themselves; and this they did because they "first gave their own selves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Let it not be overlooked that this was the result of the grace of God bestowed on them (verse 1). From their example we may learn how we may be counted "good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Tuesday: Our Best Offering – The Lord will "Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice" (Psalm 20:3) – literally "makes fat thy sacrifice." No wonder the Psalmist inserted "selah," which means 'silence,' as to say, 'pause, and think of that.' The offerings that we bring to the Lord are poor at the best. We can bring nothing to Him except that which He gives to us. When the Jew of old offered a lamb as sacrifice, he was required to bring the best of the flock. But if he had a large flock of fine animals, it was simply because the Lord had given them to him, and made them fat. So that however much he might give, he must say with David, "All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee" (1 Chronicles 29:14). But his poor neighbour would have but little to bring. His flock might be feeble. Nevertheless if he brought the best he had, the same God who made the other man's offering fat would count his as fat also. "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Corinthians 8:12).

Wednesday: The Motives of the Heart – "This poor widow hath cast in more than they all" (Luke 21:3). The loving heart and the willing mind make the gift of valuable, for in the mere offering itself, no matter how great the amount, there is nothing that is of any real value, nothing that can add to His store. He requires an offering from us, not for His benefit, but for ours. Let us offer ourselves, the only offering that He desires; since without the gift of ourselves any other offering is mockery.

Thursday: The Experience of Giving – In 1 Corinthians 16:15-18 Paul says that those who "have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints" are worthy of the highest regard; he who "soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6) – in temporal and in spiritual things. The *amount* given does not matter; that depends on circumstances; but those who devote themselves to the service of the Lord, by caring for His saints, are by Him especially honoured even on earth.