

Sabbath School Lesson #13 – The Results of Stewardship – 24–30 March 2018

Christ would have us live as witnesses of the God we serve, which means that we should exert a powerful influence on those around us, an influence for good. Thus we are told that “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12). Our Lesson study this week is taken from the following: 2 Timothy 3:1-9; Ezekiel 14:14; Philippians 4:4-13; Proverbs 3:5; 1 Peter 2:11-12; and Matthew 7:23; 25:21.

Sunday: Stewardship and Godliness – Knowledge of the truth leads to godliness (Titus 1:1). In these last days, men hate the truth. Paul writes to Timothy showing us a picture of the last days – of the time of trouble immediately preceding the coming of the Lord. The reader should remember that the destruction of ancient Babylon, and also of Jerusalem, which fell simply because it was dominated by the spirit of Babylon, was but a foretaste of the great destruction at the last day. The characteristic of those times was haughtiness, rejection of God, the exaltation of self above Him, and the persecution of those who were loyal to the truth. Even so will it be, only to a much greater degree, in the days of the coming of the Son of man. “In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:1-4, 12-13). All this wickedness is to be found in the professed church of Christ, and the professed ministers of God are to be the leaders in the persecution of the despised faithful ones, even as it was in the former days when the Roman Babylon had the ascendancy. When you look up in the fifty-sixth chapter of Isaiah, you will find there that the Sabbath truth is presented as the standard for the rallying of God’s people, the watchmen are represented as living only for themselves; and when a man lives only to please himself, he naturally despises those that are living godly lives.

Is it possible for the lives of the wicked to be spared for the sake of those who are righteous? The Lord’s answer to Abraham showed that for the sake of the righteous, the wicked could be given more time to live in this present world. In seeking to spare or save Sodom, Abraham asked, “And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake” (verse 32). The prayer of Abraham testifies to the scripture: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). We have on record some notable instances where wicked men’s lives were spared on account of a righteous man (Acts 27:21-25; Job 42:7-9). The relation that the righteous men sustain to people in the world is stated by our Lord, “Ye are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). But the presence of righteous men will not always be sufficient to save the wicked from merited punishment: “Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.” “Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon it in blood, to cut off from it man and beast; though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness” (Ezekiel 14:13-14, 19-20). The only safe place for people to occupy is stated: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler” (Psalms 91:1-4).

Monday: Contentment – We should not only be content under all the varying conditions of life, but we should be content with life itself, – be content merely to be alive. Both of these ideas are expressed in the writings of the Apostle Paul. He said, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound” (Philippians 4:11-12). And again, “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content” (1 Timothy 6:7-8). In the first text the apostle stated that he was content in every state of life; in the second, he exhorts us to be content merely to be alive; for food and raiment mean simply the support of life. Why should we not be satisfied with simple life? Christ came to this earth for the purpose of giving us life, and of perpetuating it. “I am come that they might have

life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” Christ is the life, and all things are in Him. If we have life indeed, – if we consciously lay hold of it, – we have everything that we need or desire.

These thoughts are most important for all who live in these last days. A time of trouble is coming upon us. The Lord says: “That which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted, I will pluck up, even this whole land” (Jeremiah 45:4). So He says, “Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.” Why not? – because “the day of the Lord shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.” “And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isaiah 2:12, 17). What is the use of seeking great things for ourselves, when everything is to be destroyed. When every lofty thing is to be overthrown, the only one who can escape is he who is already low. ‘He that is down need fear no fall, He that is low, no pride.’ But there is a special promise to those who are satisfied with the life which God gives, and it is worth everything. God says, “I will bring evil upon all flesh;” but though disease – the frail of their own evil habits – comes upon all flesh, He says to the contented ones: “Thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest” (Jeremiah 45:5). What a precious promise! “Thou shalt not be afraid ... for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday.” But bear in mind that our life is promised to us only as “a prey.” It is “a spoil” that is to be seized upon and saved out of the general destruction. In laying hold on eternal life, we are to fight the good fight of faith. Who is so much in love with life that he will fight for it against all the powers of evil? Whosoever is, shall live, even for ever, for “godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

Tuesday: Trust – We should not trust in flesh. Paul says, “Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Galatians 1:16). This statement is made to show that the apostle Paul did not receive the Gospel from any human being. He saw Christ, and accepted Him, then he went to Arabia, and came back to Damascus, and not till three years after his conversion did he go up to Jerusalem, where he stayed only fifteen days, and saw only two of the apostles. Moreover, the brethren were afraid of him, and would not at first believe that he was a disciple; so it is evident that he did not receive the Gospel from any man. But there is much to learn from Paul’s not conferring with flesh and blood. To be sure, he had no need to, since he had the Lord’s own word; but such a course as his is by no means common. For instance, a man reads a thing in the Bible, and then must ask some other man’s opinion before he dare believe it. If none of his friends believe it, he is fearful of accepting it. If his pastor, or some commentary, explains the text away, then away it goes; flesh and blood gain the day against the Spirit and the Word. Or, it may be that the commandment is so plain that there is no reasonable excuse for asking anybody what it means. Then the question is, ‘Can I afford to do it? Will it not cost too much sacrifice?’ The most dangerous flesh and blood that one can confer with is one’s own. It is not enough to be independent of others; in matters of truth one needs to be independent of one’s self. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:26). When the Lord speaks, our part of wisdom is to obey at once, not to consult flesh. The Lord’s name is “Counselor” (Isaiah 9:6), and He is Wonderful in counseling, so let us hear Him.

Wednesday: Our Influence – “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts.” What for? – “To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” To whom is light of the knowledge of the glory of God, that is in the face of Jesus Christ, to be given? – To everybody: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven;” “For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Then let us pray, “Thou that dwellest between the cherubim, *shine forth.*” Now, yield your bodies to be His dwelling place, that the prayer may be answered.

Thursday: The Words We Want (and Don’t Want) to Hear – It is said, ‘he who does his best does well.’ He does better than that; he does the best. Yet, there are no degrees of comparison in real goodness. There is no goodness but the goodness of God, and that cannot be bettered to the slightest degree. Thus, the highest encomium bestowed by the Master is “Well done!” Each one who has used the talents, or the single talent, entrusted to him, receives the same commendation: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Speaking of the end of the world, Jesus said: “Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22-23). It is not what we have done, but what Christ the Lord has done, that is of value. “By grace are ye saved through faith; ... not of works lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).