

Sabbath School Lesson #6 – The Ministry of Peter – 4-10 August 2018

Christ had told His disciples to take the gospel to every nation, and when Peter later understood this, it informed his ministry. It is that “then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:34-35).

Sunday: At Lydda and Joppa – “And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:35). Whom did they see? They saw Aeneas, who had kept his bed eight years, with the palsy, and who had been healed. Peter had seen him and said, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole; arise, and make thy bed.” And he arose immediately. What was the result? All that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. The most notable thing about this is not the great number that were converted. It is that they turned to the Lord, and not to Peter. It is not always a cause of rejoicing when there are many conversions reported as a result of work done. The question is, Did they turn to the Lord, or to the minister? How can people be brought to turn to the Lord instead of to the minister? By doing as Peter did, making Christ prominent. Said he, “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” Peter was not in the transaction. Christ did the work, and to Him was the glory given, and people turned to Him. In the healing of Aeneas there is a great lesson for all ministers of the Word. If they turn people to themselves, it were better that they did not do anything. It is not always the case that those who turn people to themselves instead of to the Lord, do so purposely. Men often in their zeal for the work give it their impress, instead of that of the Lord. Can this be avoided? Only by letting the Word of God do the work. When a minister tries to add to the force of the Word, he takes from it. It is quite natural to think that the simple setting forth of the Word alone will not make enough impression. Ministers feel it necessary to ‘stir up’ the people. The desire to see the people stirred is a laudable one, but they should remember that “the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Open the Word; hold it up; and Christ, who is in the Word, will draw the people to Himself.

Of Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, whom Jesus working through Peter resurrected, it is said: “This woman [Dorcas] was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9:36). That was why she did so many good works – she was full of them. Many people try to become good by doing good works; but that is impossible; for a man cannot do good works unless he has them in him; and if he has the good works in him, he will be good. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good (Luke 6:45). If one is full of good works and almsdeeds, it will not be difficult for them to appear. But how can we be full of good works and almsdeeds? The way is plain: “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippian 1:11).

Monday: At Cornelius’s House – When Peter, at the request of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and at the command of the Lord, went to Caesarea to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, his first words when he heard the story of Cornelius were, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:34-35). This was the first time that Peter had ever perceived that truth – that God is no respecter of persons, but it was not the first time that that thing was true. It had been a truth as long as God had existed. God never chose anybody to the exclusion of anybody else. The wisdom that comes from above is “without partiality” (James 3:17). It is true that the Jews as a nation were wonderfully favoured by the Lord; but they lost all their privileges simply because they assumed that God loved them better than He did anybody else, and were exclusive. All through their history God was trying to make them see that what He offered them was for the whole world, and that they were to pass on to others the light and privileges which they shared. The cases of Naaman, the Syrian, and of the Ninevites to whom Jonah was sent, are among the many instances by which God sought to show the Jews that He was no respecter of persons. Then why was the Gospel preached “to the Jew first” (Romans 1:16)? Simply because the Jews were nearest. Christ was crucified at Jerusalem. It was from there that He commissioned His disciples to

preach the Gospel. At His ascension He said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It was most natural that they should begin to preach the Gospel in the place and to the people nearest them. This is the secret of all missionary work. He who does not labour in the Gospel in his home, will not do any Gospel work although he goes to a foreign country.

Tuesday: The Gift of the Spirit – That repentance is a gift, is borne out in the ministry of Peter and of the apostles. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30-31). But it was not to Israel alone that God gave repentance through Christ. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). And so plainly did God make this appear that even the exclusive Jews were forced to exclaim, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

To mankind, the cry is, "Whosoever will, let him come." This truth was taught to Peter by the vision on the housetop. The matter was presented in a way that it was because it would make the most vivid impression upon him in his famished condition. "God is no respecter of persons." That is what Peter learned by the vision which was given to him. It was a great help in Peter's ministry. Brought up to look upon all but the Jewish nation as outcasts who God despised, and with whom it was a disgrace to associate, he learn what Paul says, that "the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." God does not think any more highly of a man that has great mental endowments, or abundant wealth, than he does of His more humble neighbour. Both are dependent on Him for what they possess. Neither does God esteem or despise any man because of his race or colour. He "hath made of one blood all nations of men," they are all His creatures, the objects of His care and grace.

Wednesday: The Church in Antioch – "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26). But the disciples were no different after they were *called* Christians from what they were before. When they were known only as Jews, they were Christians just as much as they were after they were called such. The name is of but little account unless Christ is in you (Colossians 1:27). The name "Christians" was given them because they were followers of Christ; but they were followers of Christ before they were called Christians, just as much as they were afterwards. Abraham, hundreds of years before the days of Jesus of Nazareth, was just what the disciples were who in Antioch were called Christians; he was a follower of Christ. All Christians, none others, are children of Abraham. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

Thursday: Herod's Persecution – King Herod had cast Peter into prison, intending to take him out after the Passover and kill him, to please the Jews. Chained between soldiers, three bolted doors between him and the outside of the prison, soldiers guarded the doors, Peter could not get out if he should try. He expected to die. But he was not afraid. His life was hid in Jesus, and he knew Jesus had the keys of death and would resurrect him if he died, and so he peacefully lay in prison and slept. The strong bolted gates swung open, and the angel entered, and then they closed again without a sound behind him. The light which surrounded the angel filled the prison, but did not awaken Peter. The angel glided noiselessly to his side, touched him, and said, "Arise up quickly." Peter obeyed, and as he rose the chains fell broken from his wrists. Again the angel spoke: "Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals." Then again, "Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me." Peter did as he was told. They stepped over the soldiers and passed through the three iron gates which again swung open and closed without a sound. The guards did not move. "No word was spoken. The angel passed on in front, encircled by dazzling brightness, and Peter, still believing himself in a dream, followed. They passed on through one street; then, the mission of the angel accomplished, he disappeared" {TT 78.3}. Peter left alone in the dark and quiet street, now saw that it was no dream, but that he was free indeed, and was in a part of the city where he often had been before! He said, "Now I know of a surety that the Lord has sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews." Peter hastened to tell the believers that they might praise God who had answered their prayers.