

Sabbath School Lesson #4 – Offerings for Jesus – 21-27 January 2023

Christ would have us receive freely all the benefits He bestows. The psalmist asks and answers, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all His people" (Psalm 116:12-14). The Lord has bestowed upon us all benefits of all sorts, and in countless number; "they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered" (Psalm 40:5). Now the question is, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" How shall I pay Him for what He has bestowed? And the answer is, "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." That is to say that what you are to render to the Lord for all the benefits which He has given you, is to take more benefits. Yea, more than this: what you are to render to the Lord for all the benefits which He has given, is to take the greatest of all the benefits which He can possibly give. If you have all these benefits except this greatest one, then all He asks of you to pay for all these is that you take this greatest of all. And if you have all of them, even to the greatest, then all He asks of you to pay for all these is that you take yet more of the greatest of all, – that you drink yet deeper of the cup of salvation, and call yet more upon the name of the Lord. That is the Lord's system of receiving pay for what He bestows. Many people do conscientiously give up their sinful ways to the Lord, and yet they do not have the peace that they need; their sins seem to remain in full force. Why is this? It is simply because they do not take Jesus in place of their own sinful ways. They are willing and anxious to give themselves to the Lord, but they are afraid to claim Jesus as theirs. And since they do not take anything in the place of self, self stays. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). We must take as freely as the Lord gives. To refuse to take, is virtually to say that He has not given. To take sparingly, is to imply that He gives grudgingly. The Psalmist says, by inspiration, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." How are we to pay the Lord for all that He has done for us? By taking of His nature. He loves to give. He is the soul of generosity and benevolence. He gives unselfishly. He asks nothing for Himself, for although He asks us to give ourselves to Him, He gets nothing, for we are nothing. His joy is in giving. He is never so happy as when we take freely of His gracious gift. When we take freely, we honour Him, because it shows that we believe Him to be just what He is. God has done much for me, hence I will discharge of my obligation to Him by taking more. But that increased gift brings increased obligation, which I can discharge only by taking more. But I soon find that I am under infinite obligation to Him, and nothing will suffice but that I must take His infinite gift.

Sunday: Motivation for Giving – What do you say to churches that preach prosperity gospel in a way that turns the offerings into taxation for receiving the gospel? The Gospel is a gift. To tax people for a gift is an absurdity. To come with a message of love and peace to people, which brings the news of free salvation, and then compel them to receive it, and tax them for it, is to deprive that message of all its love and peace and freedom. But some will say that the Gospel must be supported. True, but not by forced contributions. "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7); and that means that He takes no pleasure in compulsory giving. "Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart, shall ye take My offering" (Exodus 25:2), said the Lord to Moses. The moment that the raising of funds for the support of the Gospel teaching is regarded in the light of payment for instruction received, that moment the Spirit of the Gospel is gone. The Gospel can be propagated only by free gifts. Christ gave Himself, not in payment of a debt, but for those who had no claim upon Him. Those who receive the Gospel in the spirit in which is given, will also give freely, not as payment for what they have received, or may receive, but for the benefit of others. Giving on any other terms may support an ecclesiastical establishment, but it can never help the true Gospel.

Monday: What Portion for Offerings? – When we understand that the Lord is able, and willing, "to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20), and in faith we come to Him, and receive all the benefits at His hands, what portion of the received benefits shall we give Him as offerings in return? That is just what the Psalmist asked, after

God's readiness to hear had made him determined to call upon the Lord as long as he lived. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12). That is a most natural question, and the inspired answer immediately follows: "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (verse 13). How shall I pay the Lord for what He has given me? – By taking more. That is the only way. 'But then I will owe Him more than before!' Certainly, and so are you under obligation to take more than before; and as you are in duty bound to pay your debt by taking twice as much as before, so you make your debt four times as large, and to pay it you must now take eight times as much as before, and so on in endless progression. You continue taking more of Christ until all of you is saturated with the gift of Christ Himself. And if Christ is fully in you, He will give Himself to others, as an offering to others who encounter you, and the circuit of giving offerings become endless!

Tuesday: Offerings and Worship – "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). And why? It is because there is more lasting joy in giving than in receiving. Christ warns us against the sin of covetousness, – "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). "For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth" (Psalm 10:3). It was covetousness that led Lucifer to desire Christ's position. This virus of covetousness has tainted the soul of every son of Adam. This must all be taken out of man if he enters heaven. God in His wisdom has made the duty and privilege of giving a part of the worship of God. "Give unto the Lord, O ye kindred of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering, and come into His courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before Him, all the earth" (Psalm 96:7-9). Let Christ's ultimate offering overflow from us to others in worship.

Wednesday: God Takes Note of Our Offerings – What principle is found in Mark 12:41-44? If the rich give a thousand pounds without any sacrifice, it would not be so acceptable in the sight of Heaven as would a penny from the poor who deprives himself of some necessity in consequence of his gift. "For 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). While everyone must be his own judgment as to how much he will give, the obligation to give offerings rests upon all; for the Lord in Malachi says His people are robbing Him in offerings; withholding of offerings could not be robbery if the Lord had no claim on us beyond the tithe. There can be no exceptions to the rule that all should give offerings, for it would be impossible to find a person in more reduced circumstances than was the poor widow mentioned in Mark 12:42. She had only two mites (less than a penny) in the world, yet she gave, not one-tenth merely, but the whole of it; and we do not read that the Lord condemned her in the least for this act.

Thursday: Special Projects: "Big Jar" Giving – Should we have a systematic giving of offerings or move by impulse of special appeals? It will be readily seen that so far as tithes are concerned, the Bible plan of supporting the cause is very systematic. Each one gives in the same proportion, a tenth of the first-fruits of whatever they may receive, at whatever time it may come in. The Bible plan is to also be systematic in our offerings – decide the amount, set it aside periodically. "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Corinthians 14:33) and there is order and system in His works. If in doubt, a familiar Bible text settles the matter beyond controversy: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem" (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). It is evident from even a casual reading of this text that the apostle has reference to offerings, and not to the tithes. For (1) that which the churches were to lay aside is called "liberality," a term that cannot be applied to the tithe. (2) Paul said that this especial contribution was "for the poor saints which are in Jerusalem" (Romans 15:26); but the tithe, we remember, was not used for the support of the poor. And (3) the tithe is the first-fruits of the increase, and could not therefore always be paid on any day of the week; for while some might every day be receiving that which they could tithe, others might not receive anything as often as once a month. If all made systematic offerings as a matter of principle, care for the poor and the spreading of truth would not suffer want.