

Teaching Disciples: Part I

Sabbath afternoon, August 10

We are to lift the cross, and follow the steps of Christ. Those who lift the cross will find that as they do this, the cross lifts them, giving them fortitude and courage, and pointing them to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. . . .

The cross lifts you up from the lowlands of earth, and brings you into sweetest communion with God. Through bearing the cross your experience may be such that you can say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and because He lives, I shall live also." What an assurance is this!—Ellen G. White Comments, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1095.

My heart aches as I am shown how many there are who make self their idol. Christ has paid the redemption price for them. To Him belongs the service of all their powers. But their hearts are filled with self-love, and the desire for self-adorning. They give no thought to the words, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Self-gratification is hiding Christ from their view. They have no desire to walk before God in meekness and lowliness. They are not looking to Jesus. They are not praying that they may be changed into His likeness. . . .

Many who profess to be Christians are such only in name. They are not converted. They keep self prominent. They do not sit at the feet of Jesus, as Mary did, to learn of Him. They are not ready for Christ's coming.—Selected Messages, book 1, p. 80.

It is difficult for us to understand ourselves, to have a correct knowledge of our own characters. The word of God is plain, but often there is an error in applying it to one's self. There is liability to self-deception and to think its warnings and reproofs do not mean me. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" . . .

The Bible is full, clear, and explicit; the character of the true disciple of Christ is marked out with exactness. We must search the Scriptures with humble hearts, trembling at the word of the Lord, if we would not be in any way deceived in regard to our true character. There must be persevering effort to overcome selfishness and self-confidence. Self-examination must be thorough, that there be no danger of self-deception. . . . Deal truly with your own hearts, for you cannot afford to run any risk here. Count the cost of being a wholehearted Christian, and then gird on the armor. Study the Pattern; look to Jesus, and be like Him.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 332.

Sunday, August 11

Seeing Clearly

Jesus and His disciples . . . were [now] beyond the limits of Galilee, in a region where idolatry prevailed. Here the disciples were withdrawn from the controlling influence of Judaism, and brought into closer contact with the heathen worship. Around them were represented forms of superstition that existed in all parts of the world. Jesus desired that a view of these things might lead them to feel their responsibility to the heathen. During His stay in this region, He endeavored to withdraw from teaching the people, and to devote Himself more fully to His disciples.

He was about to tell them of the suffering that awaited Him. But first He went away alone, and prayed that their hearts might be prepared to receive His words. Upon joining them, He did not at once communicate that which He desired to impart. Before doing this, He gave them an opportunity of confessing their faith in Him that they might be strengthened for the coming trial.—The Desire of Ages, p. 411.

Jesus [asked the disciples]: "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." . . .

Peter had expressed the faith of the twelve. Yet the disciples were still far from understanding Christ's mission. The opposition and misrepresentation of the priests and rulers, while it could not turn them away from Christ, still caused them great perplexity. They did not see their way clearly. The influence of their early training, the teaching of the rabbis, the power of tradition, still intercepted their view of truth. From time to time precious rays of light from Jesus shone upon them, yet often they were like men groping among shadows. But on this day, before they were brought face to face with the great trial of their faith, the Holy Spirit rested upon them in power. For a little time their eyes were turned away from "the things which are seen," to behold "the things which are not seen." 2 Corinthians 4:18. Beneath the guise of humanity they discerned the glory of the Son of God.—The Desire of Ages, pp. 411, 412.

The truth which Peter had confessed is the foundation of the believer's faith. It is that which Christ Himself has declared to be eternal life. But the possession of this knowledge was no ground for self-glorification. Through no wisdom or goodness of his own had it been revealed to Peter. Never can humanity, of itself, attain to a knowledge of the divine. "It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" Job 11:8. Only the spirit of adoption can reveal to us the deep things of God, which . . . "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." 1 Corinthians 2:10. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him;" and the fact that Peter discerned the glory of Christ was an evidence that he had been "taught of God." Psalm 25:14; John 6:45.—The Desire of Ages, p. 412.

Monday, August 12

The Cost of Discipleship

Before His crucifixion the Saviour explained to His disciples that He was to be put to death and to rise again from the tomb, and angels were present to impress His words on minds and hearts. But the disciples were looking for temporal deliverance from the Roman yoke, and they could not tolerate the thought that He in whom all their hopes centered should suffer an ignominious death. The words which they needed to remember were banished from their minds; and when the time of trial came, it found them unprepared. The death of Jesus as fully destroyed their hopes as if He had not forewarned them. So in the prophecies the future is opened before us as plainly as it was opened to the disciples by the words of Christ. The events connected with the close of probation and the work of preparation for the time of trouble, are clearly presented. But multitudes have no more understanding of these important truths than if they had never been revealed. Satan watches to catch away every impression that would make them wise unto salvation, and the time of trouble will find them unready.—The Great Controversy, p. 594.

When Christ revealed to Peter the time of trial and suffering that was just before Him, and Peter replied, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee," the Saviour commanded, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Satan was speaking through Peter, making him act the part of the tempter. Satan's presence was unsuspected by Peter, but Christ could detect the presence of the deceiver, and in His rebuke to Peter He addressed the real foe. . . .

Satan's work was to discourage Jesus as He strove to save the depraved race, and Peter's words were just what he wished to hear. They were opposed to the divine plan; and whatever bore this stamp of character was an offense to God. They were spoken at the instigation of Satan. . . . [He] hoped they would discourage and dishearten Christ; but Christ addressed the author of the thought, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan."—Ellen G. White Comments, in The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1095.

He who loves God supremely and his neighbor as himself will work with the constant realization that he is a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. Making God's will his will, he will reveal in his life the transforming power of the grace of Christ. In all the circumstances of life, he will take Christ's example as his guide.

Every true, self-sacrificing worker for God is willing to spend and be spent for the sake of others. Christ says, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25). By earnest, thoughtful efforts to help where help is needed, the true Christian shows his love for God and for his fellow beings. He may lose his life in service. But when Christ comes to gather His jewels to Himself, he will find it again.—Selected Messages, book 1, p. 86.

Tuesday, August 13

The Mountain and the Multitude

Jesus had told His disciples that there were some standing with Him who should not taste of death till they should see the kingdom of God come with power. At the transfiguration this promise was fulfilled. The countenance of Jesus was there changed and shone like the sun. His raiment was white and glistening. Moses was present to represent those who will be raised from the dead at the second appearing of Jesus. And Elijah, who was translated without seeing death, represented those who will be changed to immortality at Christ's second coming and will be translated to heaven without seeing death. The disciples beheld with astonishment and fear the excellent majesty of Jesus and the cloud that overshadowed them, and heard the voice of God in terrible majesty, saying, "This is My beloved Son; hear Him."—Early Writings, p. 164.

"If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." How many a sin-burdened soul has echoed that prayer. And to all, the pitying Saviour's answer is, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." It is faith that connects us with heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness. In Christ, God has provided means for subduing every sinful trait, and resisting every temptation, however strong. But many feel that they lack faith, and therefore they remain away from Christ. Let these souls, in their helpless unworthiness, cast themselves upon the mercy of their compassionate Saviour. Look not to self, but to Christ. He who healed the sick and cast out demons when He walked among men is the same mighty Redeemer today. Faith comes by the word of God. Then grasp His promise, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." You can never perish while you do this—never.—The Desire of Ages, p. 429.

The power and malice of Satan and his host might justly alarm us were it not that we may find shelter and deliverance in the superior power of our Redeemer. We carefully secure our houses with bolts and locks to protect our property and our lives from evil men; but we seldom think of the evil angels who are constantly seeking access to us, and against whose attacks we have, in our own strength, no method of defense. If permitted, they can distract our minds, disorder and torment our bodies, destroy our possessions and our lives. Their only delight is in misery and destruction. . . . But those who follow Christ are ever safe under His watchcare. Angels that excel in strength are sent from heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about His people.—The Great Controversy, p. 517.

Wednesday, August 14

Who Is the Greatest?

At one time [the disciples disputed] as to which of their number should be accounted greatest. They did not intend their words to reach the ear of the Master; but Jesus read their hearts, and embraced the opportunity to give His disciples a lesson of humility. It was not only for the little group who listened to His words, but was to be recorded for the benefit of all His followers to the close of time. "And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:35).

Those who possess the spirit of Christ will have no ambition to occupy a position above their brethren. It is those who are small in their own eyes who will be accounted great in the sight of God. "And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me" (verses 36, 37).

What a precious lesson is this for all the followers of Christ! Those who overlook the life duties lying directly in their pathway, who neglect mercy and kindness, courtesy and love, to even a little child, are neglecting Christ.—The Sanctified Life, pp. 55, 56.

There is coming in among us a spirit which God will not suffer to rule. Never should Christians feel that they are lords over God's heritage. . . .

He who yields to this spirit of self-exaltation places himself under the control of the enemy. If ministers of the gospel cannot harmonize with all his ideas and imaginings, he turns from them and speaks against them, pouring out the sarcasm and bitterness in his heart upon ministers and ministry. . . .

Jesus has given us an example in His life of purity and perfect holiness. The most exalted being in heaven, He was the most ready to serve. The most honored, He humbled Himself to minister to those who a short time before had been disputing as to who should be the greatest in His kingdom.—This Day With God, p. 192.

God works by whom He will. He sometimes selects the humblest instrument to do the greatest work, for His power is revealed through the weakness of men. We have our standard, and by it we pronounce one thing great and another small; but God does not estimate according to our rule. We are not to suppose that what is great to us must be great to God, or that what is small to us must be small to Him. It does not rest with us to pass judgment on our talents or to choose our work. We are to take up the burdens that God appoints, bearing them for His sake, and ever going to Him for rest.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 363.

Thursday, August 15

The Healthy Man in Hell

In the epistle to the Hebrews is pointed out the single-hearted purpose that should characterize the Christian's race for eternal life: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." Hebrews 12:1, 2. Envy, malice, evil thinking, evilspeaking, covetousness—these are weights that the Christian must lay aside if he would run successfully the race for immortality. Every habit or practice that leads into sin and brings dishonor upon Christ must be put away, whatever the sacrifice. . . .

"If thy hand cause thee to stumble," the Saviour said, "Cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. And if thy foot cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life halt, rather than having thy two feet to be cast into hell." Mark 9:43–45, R.V. If to save the body from death, the foot or the hand should be cut off, or even the eye plucked out, how much more earnest should the Christian be to put away sin, which brings death to the soul!—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 312.

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation as well as in that of finite man. But however trifling this or that wrong in their course may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. The sins which man is disposed to look upon as small may be the very ones which God accounts as great crimes. The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven, while pride, selfishness, and covetousness go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 337.

It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels.

The theory of eternal torment is one of the false doctrines that constitute the wine of the abominations of Babylon, of which she makes all nations drink. Revelation 14:8; 17:2. That ministers of Christ should have accepted this heresy and proclaimed it from the sacred desk, is indeed a mystery. . . . If we turn from the testimony of God's word, and accept false doctrines because our fathers taught them, we fall under the condemnation pronounced upon Babylon; we are drinking of the wine of her abominations.—The Great Controversy, p. 536.

Friday, August 16

For Further Reading

Counsels on Stewardship, "The Task Before Us," p. 44;
The Desire of Ages, "Who Is the Greatest?" pp. 432–442.