

Jerusalem Controversies

Sabbath afternoon, August 24

The time of the Passover was drawing near, and again Jesus turned toward Jerusalem. In His heart was the peace of perfect oneness with the Father's will, and with eager steps He pressed on toward the place of sacrifice. But a sense of mystery, of doubt and fear, fell upon the disciples. The Saviour "went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid."

Again Christ called the twelve about Him, and with greater definiteness than ever before, He opened to them His betrayal and sufferings. "Behold," He said, "we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken."—The Desire of Ages, p. 547.

Jesus did not suppress one word of truth, but He uttered it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact and thoughtful, kind attention in His relationships with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He spoke the truth, but always in love. He denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity; but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, which refused to receive Him, the way, the truth, and the life. They had rejected Him, the Saviour, but He regarded them with pitying tenderness. His life was one of self-denial and thoughtful care for others. Every soul was precious in His eyes. While He ever bore Himself with divine dignity, He bowed with the tenderest regard to every member of the family of God. In all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save.

Such is the character of Christ as revealed in His life. This is the character of God. It is from the Father's heart that the streams of divine compassion, manifest in Christ, flow out to the children of men. Jesus, the tender, pitying Saviour, was God "manifest in the flesh." 1 Timothy 3:16.—Steps to Christ, p. 12.

During His ministry [Christ] was continually pursued by crafty and hypocritical men who were seeking His life. Spies were on His track, watching His words, to find some occasion against Him. The keenest and most highly cultured minds of the nation sought to defeat Him in controversy. But never could they gain an advantage. They had to retire from the field, confounded and put to shame by the lowly Teacher from Galilee. Christ's teaching had a freshness and a power such as men had never before known. Even His enemies were forced to confess, "Never man spake like this Man." John 7:46.—The Ministry of Healing, p. 51.

Sunday, August 25

The Triumphal Entry

It was on the first day of the week that Christ made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Multitudes who had flocked to see Him at Bethany now accompanied Him, eager to witness His reception. Many people were on their way to the city to keep the Passover, and these joined the multitude attending Jesus. All nature seemed to rejoice. The trees were clothed with verdure, and their blossoms shed a delicate fragrance on the air. A new life and joy animated the people. The hope of the new kingdom was again springing up.

Purposing to ride into Jerusalem, Jesus had sent two of His disciples to bring to Him an ass and its colt. . . . Jesus chose for His use the colt on which never man had sat. The disciples, with glad enthusiasm, spread their garments on the beast, and seated their Master upon it. Heretofore Jesus had always traveled on foot, and the disciples had at first wondered that He should now choose to ride. But hope brightened in their hearts with the joyous thought that He was about to enter the capital, proclaim Himself King, and assert His royal power. While on their errand they communicated their glowing expectations to the friends of Jesus, and the excitement spread far and near, raising the expectations of the people to the highest pitch.—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 569.

Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the homage which He had never before permitted, and the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to be realized by seeing Him established on the throne. The multitude were convinced that the hour of their emancipation was at hand. In imagination they saw the Roman armies driven from Jerusalem, and Israel once more an independent nation. All were happy and excited; the people vied with one another in paying Him homage. . . . They were unable to present Him with costly gifts, but they spread their outer garments as a carpet in His path. . . . They could lead the triumphal procession with no royal standards, but they cut down the spreading palm boughs, Nature's emblem of victory, and waved them aloft with loud acclamations and hosannas.—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 570.

It was the marvel of all the universe that Christ should humble Himself to save fallen man. That He who had passed from star to star, from world to world, superintending all, by His providence supplying the needs of every order of being in His vast creation—that He should consent to leave His glory and take upon Himself human nature, was a mystery which the sinless intelligences of other worlds desired to understand.—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 69.

Monday, August 26

A Cursed Tree and a Cleansed Temple

At the close of His mission [Christ] came again to the temple, and found it still desecrated as before. . . . The dignitaries of the temple were themselves engaged in buying and selling and the exchange of money. So completely were they controlled by their greed of gain that in the sight of God they were no better than thieves. . . .

Again the piercing look of Jesus swept over the desecrated court of the temple. All eyes were turned toward Him. Priest and ruler, Pharisee and Gentile, looked with astonishment and awe upon Him who stood before them with the majesty of heaven's King. . . . Christ spoke with a power that swayed the people like a mighty tempest: "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." . . .

There were none who dared question His authority. Priests and traders fled from His presence, driving their cattle before them.—The Desire of Ages, pp. 589–591.

It is the nature of the fig tree that before the leaves open, the growing fruit appears. Therefore this tree in full leaf gave promise of well-developed fruit. But its appearance was deceptive. Upon searching its branches, from the lowest bough to the topmost twig, Jesus found "nothing but leaves." It was a mass of pretentious fo-liage, nothing more.

Christ uttered against it a withering curse. . . . The next morning, as the Saviour and His disciples were again on their way to the city, the blasted branches and drooping leaves attracted their attention. "Master," said Peter, "behold, the fig tree which Thou cursedst is withered away."

Christ's act in cursing the fig tree had astonished the disciples. It seemed to them unlike His ways and works. Often they had heard Him declare that He came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. They remembered His words, "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Luke 9:56. His wonderful works had been done to restore, never to destroy. The disciples had known Him only as the Restorer, the Healer. This act stood alone. What was its purpose? they questioned.—The Desire of Ages, pp. 581, 582.

The reason why our people have not more power is that they profess the truth, but do not practice it. They have but little faith and trust in God. . . . If the mind were stayed upon God and the truth exerted a sanctifying influence upon the heart, self would be hid in Christ. . . .

[Many] have the theory of the truth, but do not feel its power in the soul. The barren fig tree flaunted its pretentious branches in the face of heaven; but when the search for fruit was made by the Redeemer, lo, there was nothing but leaves. Unless there is a thorough work wrought for you as individuals and as a church, the curse of God will as surely come upon you as it fell upon that fruitless tree.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, pp. 613, 614.

Tuesday, August 27

Who Said You Could Do That?

The priests saw that they were in a dilemma from which no sophistry could extricate them. . . . If [they] believed John's testimony, how could they deny the Messiahship of Christ? If they declared their real belief, that John's ministry was of men, they would bring upon themselves a storm of indignation; for the people believed John to be a prophet.

With intense interest the multitude awaited the decision. They knew that the priests had professed to accept the ministry of John, and they expected them to acknowledge without a question that he was sent from God. But after conferring secretly together, the priests decided not to commit themselves. Hypocritically professing ignorance, they said, "We cannot tell." "Neither tell I you," said Christ, "by what authority I do these things."—The Desire of Ages, pp. 593, 594.

Baffled and disappointed, [scribes, priests, and rulers] stood with lowering brows, not daring to press further questions upon Christ. By their cowardice and indecision they had in a great measure forfeited the respect of the people, who now stood by, amused to see these proud, self-righteous men defeated. . . .

Many of those who had anxiously awaited the result of the questioning of Jesus were finally to become His disciples, first drawn toward Him by His words on that eventful day. The scene in the temple court was never to fade from their minds. The contrast between Jesus and the high priest as they talked together was marked. The proud dignitary of the temple was clothed in rich and costly garments. . . . Before this august personage stood the Majesty of heaven, without adornment or display. His garments were travel stained; His face was pale, and expressed a patient sadness; yet written there were dignity and benevolence that contrasted strangely with the proud, self-confident, and angry air of the high priest. Many of those who witnessed the words and deeds of Jesus in the temple from that time enshrined Him in their hearts as a prophet of God.—The Desire of Ages, p. 594.

[In the parable] the lord of the vineyard had done everything needful for its prosperity. "What could have been done more to my vineyard," he says, "that I have not done in it?" Isaiah 5:4. . . . But as the husbandmen had killed the servants whom the master sent to them for fruit, so the Jews had put to death the prophets whom God sent to call them to repentance. . . . [Now] in the beloved son whom the lord of the vineyard finally sent to his disobedient servants, and whom they seized and slew, the priests and rulers saw a distinct picture of Jesus and His impending fate. Already they were planning to slay Him whom the Father had sent to them as a last appeal. In the retribution inflicted upon the ungrateful husbandmen was portrayed the doom of those who should put Christ to death.—The Desire of Ages, p. 596.

Wednesday, August 28

Earthly Duties and Heavenly Outcomes

Human theories and speculations will never lead to an understanding to God's word. Those who suppose that they understand philosophy think that their explanations are necessary to unlock the treasures of knowledge and to prevent heresies from coming into the church. But it is these explanations that have brought in false theories and heresies. . . .

The priests and Pharisees thought they were doing great things as teachers by putting their own interpretation upon the word of God, but Christ said of them, "Ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God." Mark 12:24. He charged them with the guilt of "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Mark 7:7. Though they were the teachers of the oracles of God, though they were supposed to understand His word, they were not doers of the word. Satan had blinded their eyes that they should not see its true import.—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 110.

All Christ's miracles were wrought to bless those whom these leading Jews neglected and despised, and refused to help. And He was beloved [by the common people] because He was the Restorer, the Great Physician. All His graces were light from heaven. In every good work He sought to lead them to accept Him as their personal Saviour. His life was fragrant, a savor of life unto life. He brought sunshine into the heart and home. They came to Him mourning, and left Him with songs of praise and glad rejoicing. He offered Himself to them that they might give Him a home in their hearts.

And yet they [the Jewish leaders] would not receive Him. While they claimed to keep the law, they denied it by their works. Having eyes they saw not, because of the ignorance that was in them through the hardness of their hearts. The impurity of their hearts, the defiling practices of their lives, their selfishness, their envy, their jealousy, their evil surmising, their transgression of the law of God, while they claimed to keep it, bore continual testimony as to their character. By the fruit the tree was known. Christ laid bare their true character.—This Day With God, p. 275.

Nowhere in the Sacred Scriptures is found the statement that the righteous go to their reward or the wicked to their punishment at death. The patriarchs and prophets have left no such assurance. Christ and His apostles have given no hint of it. The Bible clearly teaches that the dead do not go immediately to heaven. They are represented as sleeping until the resurrection. 1 Thessalonians 4:14; Job 14:10–12. In the very day when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl broken (Ecclesiastes 12:6), man's thoughts perish. They that go down to the grave are in silence. They know no more of anything that is done under the sun. Job 14:21. Blessed rest for the weary righteous! Time, be it long or short, is but a moment to them. They sleep; they are awakened by the trump of God to a glorious immortality.—The Great Controversy, p. 549.

Thursday, August 29

The Greatest Commandment

The scribe who had questioned Jesus was well read in the law, and he was astonished at His words. He did not expect Him to manifest so deep and thorough a knowledge of the Scriptures. He had gained a broader view of the principles underlying the sacred precepts. Before the assembled priests and rulers he honestly acknowledged that Christ had given the right interpretation to the law, saying:

“Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but He: and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

The wisdom of Christ’s answer had convicted the scribe. He knew that the Jewish religion consisted in outward ceremonies rather than inward piety. He had some sense of the worthlessness of mere ceremonial offerings, and the faithless shedding of blood for expiation of sin. Love and obedience to God, and unselfish regard for man, appeared to him of more value than all these rites. The readiness of this man to acknowledge the correctness of Christ’s reasoning, and his decided and prompt response before the people, manifested a spirit entirely different from that of the priests and rulers. The heart of Jesus went out in pity to the honest scribe who had dared to face the frowns of the priests and the threats of the rulers to speak the convictions of his heart. “And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 607, 608.

The commandments of God are comprehensive and far reaching; in a few words they unfold the whole duty of man. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12:30, 31). In these words the length and breadth, the depth and height, of the law of God is comprehended; for Paul declares, “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). The only definition we find in the Bible for sin is that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). . . . Many are deceived concerning the condition of their hearts. They do not realize that the natural heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. They wrap themselves about with their own righteousness, and are satisfied in reaching their own human standard of character; but how fatally they fail when they do not reach the divine standard, and of themselves they cannot meet the requirements of God.

We may measure ourselves by ourselves, we may compare ourselves among ourselves, we may say we do as well as this one or that one, but the question to which the judgment will call for an answer is, Do we meet the claims of high heaven? Do we reach the divine standard? Are our hearts in harmony with the God of heaven?—*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 320, 321.

Friday, August 30

For Further Reading

This Day With God, "Heart Holiness," p. 146;

The Desire of Ages, "Controversy," pp. 601–609.