

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Least of These:
Ministering to Those in Need
Lesson 7: Jesus and Those in Need

God calls upon those who serve Him to minister to others in need. He told Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to the world: "Thou shalt be a blessing, ... and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2, 3). Jesus saw that His mission was to help those in need: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel [good news, glad tidings] to the poor [those who can't afford medical treatment]; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18). These "poor" may be in India, Africa, South America, Mexico, yes, in our inner cities, perhaps among our teens in high school, who knows, maybe your next-door neighbor whose tears you cannot understand.

Jesus' mother, Mary, was distinguished as quiet and thoughtful. She apparently loved beautiful literature, and was herself competent as a poetess. This is evident in her poem known as the "Song of Mary" (Luke 1:46-55). Her childlike faith was so mature that God could employ her as His agent in the greatest miracle of all time.

But probably more than any other woman, Mary had a capacity for sorrow. "Blessed" (happy) she was indeed, but her sensitive soul could also be rent with a pain that no other woman of all time could know. "A sword will pierce through your own soul also," said the discerning Simeon as a surge of inspiration thrilled his soul while he held her holy Child in his arms in the Temple (Luke 2:35). That sword was to pierce her soul many times during the next 33 years; then she had to watch her Son die on a cross. That was a pain infinitely beyond that of any ordinary mother who watches an ordinary son die in agony and abuse, for His death surpassed in magnitude all other deaths.

Jesus said in Mark 14:7 that as long as time lasts, there will be poor people all around us. In the final judgment day, we will be very much embarrassed if we have not helped them. In fact, Jesus' parable in Matthew 25 hinges our eternal destiny on how we have treated the poor. He says that He will tell each person, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Luke 4:40). In other words, Jesus identified Himself with poor, needy people.

Jesus loved both rich and poor, but He had nicer things to say to the poor. For example, He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3), and "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth" (vs. 5). Or, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 10).

The word “blessed” means “happy.” Not happy in the sense of fun and games, but happy with that deep inward sense of peace, living in the sunshine of God’s favor. The Father of our Lord Jesus is pledged to “bless” the poor who appreciate His love. The Bible is full of encouragement for poor people: “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles” (Psalm 34:6). “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth. ... The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing [there is no promise that you’ll never get sick, but there is the promise that the Lord will be your attending Physician and your special duty Nurse, for] Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness” (41:1-3). If you are poor, be thankful for the special blessings the Lord has promised you, and rejoice. It may well be that the Lord is favoring you especially so that you will be that much more happy in the kingdom of heaven.

Psalm 41:1-3 has a very valuable promise: “Happy are those who are concerned for the poor; the Lord will help them when they are in trouble. The Lord will protect them and preserve their lives; He will make them happy in the land; He will not abandon them to the power of their enemies. The Lord will help them when they are sick and will restore them to health” (*Good News Bible*).

Note the word “concerned” does not mean flipping a coin to a poor person now and then, and responding grudgingly to an appeal for help. It means a constant state of the heart, a constant feeling of concern for the needs of others, a habitual desire to help. The Lord notices when that kind of concern fills our hearts and He responds by helping us when we are in need. And note verse 2: He will make us happy, and will not abandon us to those who would harm us. And verse 3: This is especially precious—the Lord will help us when we are sick and restore us to health. All because we have a habitual concern for poor people!

There are many poor people in the world today and one wonders what to do to help them. One doesn’t like to pour water down the drain; some people are poor because they waste what they have. In the long run, what poor people need most of all is a true knowledge of the pure gospel of Christ. Only at the cross of Christ can they learn the secret of true self-respect. Let’s remember that nothing that we possess is really our own—we are just managers of the Lord’s wealth!

Each of us who realizes his or her debt to the “Saviour of the world” will want to be ready to “know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary” (Isa. 50:4), because the Lord has sent us to do the work that He would do if He were here in person. As Paul says, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, that bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15).

One of the great truths of the 1888 message is that In seeking us, Christ came all the way to where we are, taking upon Himself “the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” Thus He is a Saviour “nigh at hand, not afar off.” He “is the Saviour of all men,” even “the chief of sinners.” But sinners have the freedom to refuse Him and reject Him.

“The true faith—the faith of Jesus, is that He *has come* to us just where we are; that, infinitely pure and holy as He is, and sinful, degraded, and lost, as we are, ... by His Holy Spirit [He] will willingly dwell with us and in us, to save us, to purify us, and to make us holy.” [1]

Ellen White wrote: “Many say that Jesus was not like us, that He was not as we are in the world, that He was divine, and therefore we cannot overcome as He overcame. But this is not true; ‘for verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. ... For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.’ Christ knows the sinner’s trials; He knows his temptations. He took upon Himself our nature. ... The Christian’s ... strongest temptations will come from within; for he must battle against the inclinations of the natural heart. The Lord knows our weaknesses. ... Every struggle against sin, every effort to conform to the law of God, is Christ working through His appointed agencies upon the human heart. Oh, if we could comprehend what Jesus is to us!” [2]

The ministry of Christ in His Most Holy Apartment in the heavenly sanctuary reveals Him as being close to us; as a true High Priest in ancient Israel who was always “for the people,” always concerned for them, always revealing to them his nearness and his love, so Christ in His second apartment in the heavenly sanctuary, the Most Holy Apartment, is ministering His presence and His blessing to us as one who is described in Proverbs 18:24—He is “closer than a brother.”

He took on Himself the fallen, sinful nature of our father Adam so that He might reach us where we are; therefore He was “in all points tempted like as we are [tempted], yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

This is a revelation of Christ that millions don’t as yet perceive: to be tempted is not sin: before temptation can be sin you must *yield* to it, *give in* to it, *let* the temptation become the sinful act. Christ has conquered sin, has trampled on it, defeated it, condemned sin *in our fallen sinful flesh*. “Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made *like* unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God” (2:17).

Sing Hallelujah, rejoice forever more!

—From the Writings of Robert J. Wieland

Endnotes:

[1] A. T. Jones, *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*, pp. 45, 46, Glad Tidings ed., 2003

[2] Ellen G. White, *Christ Tempted As We Are*, The Bible Student’s Library, pp. 3, 9; 1894; LMN ed.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWeYvyP7Fro>

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