To Be Pleasing to God

Lesson 5, 1st Quarter January 11-17, 2025

Sabbath Afternoon January 11

Memory Text:

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." KJV — Zephaniah 3:17

"Why do we keep so silent in regard to the goodness of the Lord? Why is there so little praise and thanksgiving? How heaven must look upon our ungrateful service, so like the sullenness of perverted children! All heaven is interested in our salvation. The Lord God himself is our helper. "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem." "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." This is the testimony the Lord desires us to bear to the world. RH May 22, 1900, par. 7

"Such a testimony will have an influence upon others. As we seek to turn men from their errors, we must show them that we have something better, if more joy were revealed in our religious experience, a much more favorable impression would be made. Unbelievers would see the consistency of our faith. If we praised God's name as we should, the flame of love would be kindled in many hearts." RH May 22, 1900, par. 8

Sunday, January 12

More valuable than you can imagine

Read Luke 15:11–32. What does the parable of the prodigal son reveal about God's compassion and love? What warning does it provide for those who, like the other son, remained home?

The story is that there were two sons in the family. The older one chose to remain home, but the younger one chose to go away. And you know what happened shortly afterwards: The younger son wasted all his substance in riotous living.

I am sure that the father knew beforehand that his son was headed for hardship. He loved him and longed to spare the youth from shame, sorrow and hard trial that he was destined for. The very fact that on the boy's return the father met him while yet a long way off, and made a banquet for him, even after he had wasted his father's substance and disgraced the family name, is a striking illustration of the father loved the boy supremely. The boy was allowed to leave home only because nothing but experience of his own could ever demonstrate his folly, and prove the father's love to him.

What forced the boy to dislike home? – It was his desire to live riotously. No boy or girl under the same circumstances runs away from home except for the hope of gaining freedom and to practice riotous living, to do all what the carnal heart longs to do.

He finally discovered that he had been playing the fool, and so he began to reason with himself about going back home, saying, "Doth thine ass stand by the stall? Why should I be a fool? Why should I be a fool? Why should I perish with hunger? But, what shall I say when I get home? Having come to himself, he felt, of course, that he must say just the right thing, the thing that would commend him. Instead as well as it is, he said:

Had that boy taken his father's counsel in the first place, he would not have had to be humiliated. And what a humiliation! And what a lesson, too, not only for the young, but for the old also. Yes, there are thousands, young and old alike, who learn great lessons, but they learn them in a remarkable way, and only because they refuse to listening to the "humbug" of the Devil. Why are they so easily carried away with his allurements? - Only because his attractive bait appeals to man's selfish and carnal nature.

The prodigal's humiliation awaits all the young who do not profit by the counsel of the older, and all the older who do not profit by the counsel of the Lord. This is one of the laws of God which no one has ever been able to dodge.

"The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him, and He sets in operation influences to bring him back to the Father's house. The prodigal son in his wretchedness "came to himself." The deceptive power that Satan had exercised over him was broken. He saw that his suffering was the result of his own folly, and he said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father." Miserable as he was, the prodigal had hope in the conviction of his father's love. It was that love which was drawing him toward home. It is the assurance of God's love that constrains the sinner to return to God. "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." Romans 2:4. A golden chain, the mercy and compassion of God, is wrapped around every soul. Regarding the prodigal son's departure, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Jeremiah 31:3, COL 202.1

"The son determined to confess his guilt. He will go to his father, saying, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But he adds, knowing how stirred is his conception of his father's love, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." COL 202.2

"Do not listen to the enemy's suggestion to stay away from Christ until you have made yourself better; until you are good enough to come to God. If you wait until then, you will never come. When Satan points to your filthy garments, repeat the promise of Jesus, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." John 6:37. Tell the enemy that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Make the prayer of David your own, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Psalm 51:7. COL 203.2

"Arise and go to your father. He will meet you a great way off. If you take even one step toward Him in repentance, He will hasten to enfold you in His arms of infinite love. His ear is open to the cry of the contrite soul. The very first reaching out of the heart after God is known to Him. Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after good is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it. Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul." COL 206.1

Monday, January 13

Rejoicing with Gladness

Read Zephaniah 3:17. How does this verse shed light on the parable of the prodigal son?

"When Christ's ambassadors present the gospel in its simplicity, and the hearers respond to the word presented, nothing is more gratifying to the heart of Infinite Love than for these souls to come to him confessing their sins and giving expressions to their love and gratitude. Christ is ever ready to receive penitents, and yet how seldom they see hearers ready to receive the communication of light and pardon and love. When Mangkhing arises from Human hearts, heavenly beings take up the song of praise. The prophet Zephaniah represents the joy of Christ over the salvation of a lost soul: The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." RH May 29, 1900, par. 10

"All heaven is interested in our salvation. The angels of God, thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, are commissioned to minister in behalf of those who are to be heirs of salvation. They are discoursed on against evil, and press back the powers of darkness that are seeking our destruction. SW March 10, 1908, par. 8

"The Lord himself is our helper; "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem." The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." Zephaniah 3:14, 17. This is the testimony the Lord desires us to bear to the world. His praise should continually be in our hearts and upon our lips." DA March 10, 1908, par. 9

Read Ephesians 5:25–28. What does this say about the kind of love we are also called to display?

"The spirit that Christ manifests toward us is the spirit that husband and wife are to manifest toward each other. "As Christ also hath loved us," "walk in love." "As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Ephesians 5:2, 24, 25." MH 361.4

Tuesday, January 14

Pleasing God

Read Isaiah 43:4; Psalm 149:4, and Proverbs 15:8. 9. What do they tell us about God taking delight in His people?

"Of Christ's relation to His people, there is a beautiful illustration in the laws given to Israel. When through poverty a Hebrew had been forced to sell himself to his brethren, and thus to sell himself as a bondservant, the duty of redeeming him and his inheritance fell to the one who was nearest of kin. See Leviticus 25:25, 47-49; Ruth 2:20. So the work of redemption and joy in redemption belong to Christ. He is our kinsman, and yet who is "near of kin" unto us. It was to redeem us that He became our kinsman. Closer than father, mother, brother, friend, or lover is the Lord our Saviour. "Fear not," He says, "for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; mine is thou." Since thou must precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." Isaiah 43:1, 4. COL 19.2

"Christ loves the heavenly beings that surround His throne; but what does account for the great love wherewith He has loved us? We cannot understand it, but we can know it true in our own experience. And if we do hold the beginning of our faith steadfast, we shall be able to say, "We are dead those who are brethren and sisters of our Lord! Should we not be quick to recognize the claims of our divine relationship? Adopted into the family of God, should we not honor our Father and our kindred? DA 327.4

"Often the church militant is called upon to suffer trial and affliction; for not without severe conflict is the church to triumph. "The bread of adversity," "the water of affliction" Isaiah 30:20, these are the common lot of all, but none who put their trust in the One mighty to deliver will be utterly overwhelmed. "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour." I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life." Isaiah 43:1-4." PK 723.1

Wednesday, January 15

Living Stones

Read Romans 8:1 and Romans 5:8. What do these texts teach about our standing before God?

"While the Christian's life will be characterized by humility, it should not be marked with sadness and self-depreciation. It is the privilege of everyone to so live that God will approve and bless him. It is not the will of our heavenly Father that we should live in continual doubt and fear concerning our salvation. There is a necessary for humility in going with the head bowed down and the heart filled with thoughts of self. We may go to Jesus and be cleansed, and stand before the law without condemnation. Christ's righteousness is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8:1." GC 477.2

"Christ was the Majesty of heaven; and yet behold him dying in man's stead. What love is this? For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "If November 24, 1890, par. 3

Read 1 Peter 2:4-6 and compare it with Hebrews 11:6. What does this tell us about how we can be pleasing to God?

"Upon this living stone, Jews and Gentiles alike may build. This is the only foundation upon which we may securely build. It is broad enough for all, and strong enough to sustain the weight and burden of the whole world. Christ is the foundation, the rock, the chosen, the precious, the sure foundation. Upon this foundation the lost and perisha are by their own endeavors heap, piled and beaded but that they cannot become fast and sure, because they are not connected with Christ. Without this connection, no man can be saved. Without the life of Christ in us, we cannot withstand the storms of temptation. Our eternal safety depends upon our connection with the sure foundation. Multitudes are today building upon foundations that have not been tested. When the rain fails, and the tempest rage, and the floods come, their house will fall, because it is not founded upon the eternal Rock, the chief cornerstone Christ Jesus." DA 595.4

"Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder (of them that diligently seek him." There are many in the Christian world who claim that all that is necessary to salvation is to have faith; works are nothing; faith is the only essential. But God's word tells us that faith without works is dead, being alone. Many refuse to obey God's commandments, yet they make a great deal of faith. But faith must have a foundation. God's promises are all made upon conditions. If we do his will, if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Christ, God's standard, God will bear our petitions; but he will not bless us in disobedience. If we choose to disobey his commandments, we may cry, "Faith, faith, only have faith," and the response will come back from the sure word of God, "Faith without works is dead." Such faith will only be as sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal. In order to have the benefits of God's grace, we must do our part; we must faithfully work, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance." ST June 16, 1890, par. 1

Thursday, January 16

A Worthy Goal

Read Mark 9:17–29. How does God respond to the man in the story? How much faith is enough faith?

"The boy was brought, and as the Saviour's eyes fell upon him, the evil spirit cast him to the ground in convulsions of agony. He lay wallowing and foaming, rending the air with unearthly shrieks. DA 428.1

Again the Prince of life and the prince of the powers of darkness had met on the field of battle.—Christ in fulfillment of His mission to "preach deliverance to the captives, ... to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18), Satan seeking to hold his victim under his control. Angels of light and the hosts of evil angels, unseen, were pressing near to behold the conflict. For a moment, Jesus permitted the evil spirit to display his power, that the beholders might comprehend the deliverance about to be wrought. DA 428.2

"The multitude looked on with baited breath, the father in an agony of hope and fear. Jesus asked, "How long is it ago since this came unto him?" The father told the story of long years of suffering, and then, as if he could endure no more, exclaimed, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." "If Thou canst!" Even now the father questioned the power of Christ. DA 428.3

"Jesus answers, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." There is no lack of power on the part of Christ; the healing of the son depends upon the father's faith. With a burst of tears, realizing his own weakness, the father casts himself upon Christ's mercy, with the cry, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." DA 428.6

"Jesus turns to the suffering one, and says, "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him." The cry, as it departs, rends the frame. The sufferer, to passing, seems about to rend the life from his victim. Then the boy lies motionless, and apparently lifeless. The multitude whisper, "He is dead." But Jesus takes the hand of the child, and lifts him from the ground, in perfect soundness of mind and body. In his father, Father and son praise the name of the Deliverer. The multitude are "amazed at the mighty power of God," while the scribes, defeated and crestfallen, turn sullenly away. DA 428.7

"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, "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. These grap ms promises: "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." DA 429.1

Friday, January 17

Further Thought

"The nine disciples were yet pondering upon the bitter fact of their own failure; and when Jesus was once more alone with them, they questioned, "Why could not we cast him out?" Jesus answered them, "Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." Their unbelief, that their faith had not been strengthened with Christ, and the carelessness with which they regarded the sacred work committed to them, had caused their failure in the conflict with the powers of darkness. DA 429.2

"The words of Christ pointing to His death brought sadness and doubt. And the selection of the three disciples to accompany Jesus to the mountain had excited the jealousy of the nine. Instead of strengthening their faith by prayer and meditation on the words of Christ, they had been dwelling on their disappointment and personal grievances. In this state of darkness they had underlaine the conflict with Satan. DA 431.1

"In order to succeed in such a conflict they must come to the world as Christ came to it. They must be strengthened by fervent prayer and fasting, and humiliation of heart. They must be emptied of self, and be filled with the Spirit and power of God. Earnest, persevering supplication to God is faith—faith that leads to entire dependence upon God, and unreserved consecration to His work—can alone avail to bring men the Holy Spirit's aid in the battle against principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in high places. DA 431.2

"If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed," said Jesus, "ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove. Though the grain of mustard seed is so small, it contains that same mysterious life principle which produces growth in the lofliest tree. When the mustard seed is cast into the ground, the tiny germ begins to work. It sends out roots and tender shoots, which, if not hindered, will continue to make growth. If you have faith like this, you will be lifted upon God's word, and upon all the helpful agencies he has appointed. Thus your faith will strengthen, and will bring to your aid the power of heaven. The obstacles that are piled by Satan across your path, though apparently as impenetrable as the mountains of Israel, shall disappear before the demand of faith. Nothing shall be impossible unto you." DA 431.3