

Lesson 3

The Birdcage

Sabbath Afternoon, July 9

Do not look upon trial as something strange, but as the means by which we are to be purified and strengthened. “Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,” James admonishes; “knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2, 3).

In the future life we shall understand things that here greatly perplex us. We shall realize how strong a helper we had and how angels of God were commissioned to guard us as we followed the counsel of the Word of God.

To all who receive Him, Christ will give power to become the sons of God. He is a present help in every time of need. Let us be ashamed of our wavering faith. Those who are overcome have only themselves to blame for their failure to resist the enemy. All who choose can come to Christ and find the help they need.

—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 257.

“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Philippians 4:8. This will require earnest prayer and unceasing watchfulness. We must be aided by the abiding influence of the Holy Spirit, which will attract the mind upward, and habituate it to dwell on pure and holy things. And we must give diligent study to the word of God. . . . “Thy word,” says the psalmist, “have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.” Psalm 119:11.

— *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 460.

The Lord’s agents should have a sanctified zeal, a zeal that is wholly under His control. Stormy times will come rapidly enough upon us, and we should take no course of our own that will hasten them. Tribulation will come of a character that will drive to God all who wish to be His, and His alone. Until tested and proved in the furnace of trial, we do not know ourselves, and it is not proper for us to measure the characters of others and to condemn those who have not yet had the light of the third angel’s message.

If we wish men to be convinced that the truth we believe sanctifies the soul and transforms the character, let us not be continually charging them with vehement accusations. In this way we shall force them to the conclusion that the doctrine we profess cannot be the Christian doctrine, since it does not make us kind, courteous, and respectful. Christianity is not manifested in pugilistic accusations and condemnation.

. . . One of the greatest curses in our world (and it is seen in churches and in society everywhere) is the love of supremacy. Men become absorbed in seeking to secure power and popularity. This spirit has manifested itself in the ranks of Sabbathkeepers, to our grief and shame. But spiritual success comes only to those who have learned meekness and lowliness in the school of Christ.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 396, 397.

Sunday, July 10

To the Promised Land via a Dead End

The children of Israel seemed to possess an evil heart of unbelief. They were unwilling to endure hardships in the wilderness. When they met with difficulties in the way, they would regard them as impossibilities. Their confidence in God would fail, and they could see nothing before them but death. . . .

. . . The Lord was willing that they should be brought short in their food, and that they should meet with difficulties, that their hearts should turn to Him who had hitherto helped them, that they might believe in him. He was ready to be to them a present help. If in their want they would call upon him, he would manifest to them tokens of his love, and continual care. But they seemed to be unwilling to trust the Lord any farther than they could witness before their eyes the continual evidences of his power. If they had possessed true faith and a firm confidence in God, inconveniences and obstacles, or even real suffering, would have been cheerfully borne, after the Lord had wrought in such a wonderful manner for their deliverance from servitude. Moreover, the Lord promised them if they would obey his commandments, no disease should rest upon them; for he says, "I am the Lord that healeth thee."

—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 249, 250.

The unbelief and murmurings of the children of Israel illustrate the people of God now upon the earth. Many . . . do not know themselves. God frequently proves them, and tries their faith in small things, and they do not endure the trial any better than did ancient Israel.

. . . When difficulties arise, or when they are brought into strait places—when their faith and love to God is tested, they shrink from the trial, and murmur at the process by which God has chosen to purify them. Their love does not prove pure and perfect, to bear all things. The faith of the people of the God of Heaven should be strong, active, and enduring—the substance of things hoped for. Then the language of such will be, Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name; for he hath dealt bountifully with me.

—*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, pp. 251, 252.

The history of the Old Testament was recorded for the benefit of those who should live in the generations following. . . . Both Old and New Testament Scriptures teach the principles of obedience to the commandments of God as the terms of securing that life which measures with the life of God, for it is through obedience that we become partakers of the divine nature, and learn to escape the corruptions that are in the world through lust. Therefore its maxims are to be studied, its commands obeyed, its principles, which are more precious than gold, brought into the daily life.

—**Letter 342, September 2, 1907,**

Monday, July 11

Bitter Waters

By the command of God, the children of Israel were brought to Rephidim, a place destitute of water. He who was enshrouded in the pillar of cloud was leading them, and it was by His express command that they were encamped at this place. God knew of the lack of water at Rephidim, and He brought His people hither to test their faith.

—*Reflecting Christ*, p. 353.

Moses smote the rock, but it was Christ who stood by him and caused the water to flow from the flinty rock. The people tempted the Lord in their thirst, and said, If God has brought us out here, why does He not give us water, as well as bread. [This] showed criminal unbelief and made Moses afraid that God would punish them for their wicked murmurings. The Lord tested the faith of His people, but they did not endure the trial. They murmured for food and for water, and complained of Moses. Because of their unbelief, God suffered their enemies to make war with them, that He might manifest to His people from whence cometh their strength.

—*The Story of Redemption*, pp. 132, 133.

Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. Exodus 17:6.

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The refreshing water, welling up in a parched and barren land, . . . is an emblem of the divine grace which Christ alone can bestow, and which is as the living water purifying, refreshing, and invigorating the soul. He in whom Christ is abiding has within him a never-failing fountain of grace and strength.

—*That I May Know Him*, p. 23.

Tuesday, July 12

The Great Controversy in the Desert

After the fall of man, Satan declared that human beings were proved to be incapable of keeping the law of God, and he sought to carry the universe with him in this belief. Satan's words appeared to be true, and Christ came to unmask the deceiver. The Majesty of heaven undertook the cause of man, and with the same facilities that man may obtain, withstood the temptations of Satan as man must withstand them. This was the only way in which fallen man could become a partaker of the divine nature. In taking human nature, Christ was fitted to understand man's trials and sorrows and all the temptations wherewith he is beset. Angels who were unacquainted with sin could not sympathize with man in his peculiar trials. Christ condescended to take man's nature, and was tempted in all points like as we, that He might know how to succor all who should be tempted.

—Selected Messages, book 1, p. 252.

The thrones and kingdoms of the world and the glory of them were offered to Christ if He would only bow down to Satan. Never will man be tried with temptations as powerful as those which assailed Christ. . . .

Satan has better success in approaching man. All this money, this gain, this land, this power, these honors and riches, will I give thee—for what? His conditions generally are, that integrity shall be yielded, conscientiousness blunted, and selfishness indulged. Through devotion to worldly interests, Satan receives all the homage he asks. The door is left open for him to enter as he pleases, with his evil train of impatience, love of self, pride, avarice, overreaching, and his whole catalogue of evil spirits. Man is charmed and treacherously allured on to ruin. If we yield ourselves to worldliness of heart and life, Satan is satisfied.

Christ's example is before us. He overcame Satan, showing us how we may also overcome. Christ resisted Satan with scripture. . . . Christ's example is before us. If the Sacred Scriptures were studied and followed, the Christian would be fortified to meet the wily foe; but the word of God is neglected, and disaster and defeat follow.

—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, pp. 45, 46.

The human family have all the help that Christ had in their conflicts with Satan. They need not be overcome. They may be more than conquerors through Him who has loved them and given His life for them. "Ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). And what a price! ☒e Son of God in His humanity wrestled with the very same fierce, apparently overwhelming temptations that assail men—temptations to indulgence of appetite, to presumptuous venturing where God has not led them, and to the worship of the god of this world, to sacrifice an eternity of bliss for the fascinating pleasures of this life. Everyone will be tempted, but the Word declares that we shall not be tempted above our ability to bear. We may resist and defeat the wily foe.

—Selected Messages, book 1, p. 95.

Wednesday, July 13

An Enduring Legacy

Are you filled with sorrow today? Fasten your eyes on the Sun of righteousness. Do not try to adjust all the difficulties, but turn your face to the light, to the throne of God. What will you see there? ☒e rainbow of the covenant, the living promise of God. Beneath it is the mercy seat, and whosoever avails himself of the provisions of mercy that have been made and appropriates the merits of the life and death of Christ has in the rainbow of the covenant a blessed assurance of acceptance with the Father as long as the throne of God endures.

Faith is what you need. Do not let faith waver. Fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life. It will be a severe fight, but fight it at any cost, for the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Put your hand in the hand of Christ. There are difficulties to be overcome, but angels that excel in strength will cooperate with the people of God. Face Zion, press your way to the city of solemnities. A glorious crown and a robe woven in the loom of heaven await the overcomer. Though Satan would cast his hellish shadow athwart your pathway and seek to hide from your view the mystic ladder that stretches from earth to the throne of God, on which ascend and descend the angels who are ministering spirits to those who shall be heirs of salvation, yet press your way upward, plant your feet on one round after another, and advance to the throne of the Infinite.

—*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, pp. 462, 463.

“Ye greatly rejoice,” Peter wrote, “though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, . . . ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”

The apostle’s words were written for the instruction of believers in every age, and they have a special significance for those who live at the time when “the end of all things is at hand.” His exhortations and warnings, and his words of faith and courage, are needed by every soul who would maintain his faith “steadfast unto the end.” Hebrews 3:14.

The apostle sought to teach the believers how important it is to keep the mind from wandering to forbidden themes or from spending its energies on trifling subjects. Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices, must guard well the avenues of the soul.

—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 518, 519.

Thursday, July 14

Trial by Fire

We should not present our petitions to God to prove whether He will fulfill His word, but because He will fulfill it; not to prove that He loves us, but because He loves us. “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.” Hebrews 11:6.

But faith is in no sense allied to presumption. Only he who has true faith is secure against presumption. For presumption is Satan’s counterfeit of faith. Faith claims God’s promises, and brings forth fruit in obedience. Presumption also claims the promises, but uses them as Satan did, to excuse transgression. Faith would have led our first parents to trust the love of God, and to obey His commands. Presumption led them to transgress His law, believing that His great love would save them from the consequence of their sin. It is not faith that claims the favor of Heaven without complying with the conditions on which mercy is to be granted. Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.

—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 126.

In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified.

. . . The Lord allows His chosen ones to be placed in the furnace of affliction to prove what temper they are of and whether they can be fashioned for His work.

—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

Do the work that is nearest you. Do it, even though it may be amid perils and hardships in the missionary field; but do not, I beg of you, complain of hardships and self-sacrifices. Look at the Waldenses. See what plans they devised that the light of the gospel might shine into benighted minds. We should not labor with the expectation of receiving our reward in this life, but with our eyes fixed steadfastly upon the prize at the end of the race. Men and women are wanted now who are as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men and women who will work without having their way smoothed and every obstacle removed.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 406.

Friday, July 15
For Further Reading

The Desire of Ages, “The Temptation,” pp. 114–123;

This Day With God, “Light Out of Darkness,” p. 348.