

Lesson 13

Christ in the Crucible

Sabbath Afternoon, September 17

It was a being of wonderful power and glory that had set himself against God. Of Lucifer the Lord says, “Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.” Ezekiel 28:12. Lucifer had been the covering cherub. He had stood in the light of God’s presence. He had been the highest of all created beings, and had been foremost in revealing God’s purposes to the universe. After he had sinned, his power to deceive was the more deceptive, and the unveiling of his character was the more difficult, because of the exalted position he had held with the Father.

God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government. The Lord’s principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God’s government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power.

—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 758, 759.

Jesus did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do; and He exclaimed with His parting breath, “It is finished!” Angels rejoiced as the words were uttered, for the great plan of redemption was being triumphantly carried out. There was joy in heaven that the sons of Adam could now, through a life of obedience, be exalted finally to the presence of God. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost.

—*The Story of Redemption*, pp. 226, 227.

[Satan] had hoped to break up the plan of salvation; but it was laid too deep. And now by the death of Christ he knew that he himself must finally die, and his kingdom be given to Jesus. He held a council with his angels. He had prevailed nothing against the Son of God, and now they must increase their efforts and with their power and cunning turn to His followers. They must prevent all whom they could from receiving the salvation purchased for them by Jesus. By so doing Satan could still work against the government of God. Also it would be for his own interest to keep from Jesus as many as possible. For the sins of those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ will at last be rolled back upon the originator of sin, and he must bear their punishment, while those who do not accept salvation through Jesus will suffer the penalty of their own sins.

—*Early Writings*, p. 178.

Sunday, September 18

The Early Days

After Christ had condescended to leave His high command, step down from an infinite height and assume humanity, He could have taken upon Him any condition of humanity He might choose. But greatness and rank were nothing to Him, and He selected the lowest and most humble walk of life. The place of His birth was Bethlehem, and on one side His parentage was poor, but God, the Owner of the world, was His Father. No trace of luxury, ease, selfish gratification, or indulgence was brought into His life, which was a continual round of self-denial and self-sacrifice. In accordance with His humble birth, He had apparently no greatness or riches, in order that the humblest believer need not say that Christ never knew the stress of pinching poverty. Had He possessed the semblance of outward show, of riches, of grandeur, the poorest class of humanity would have shunned His society; therefore He chose the lowly condition of the far greater number of the people. The truth of heavenly origin was to be His theme: He was to sow the earth with truth; and He came in such a way as to be accessible to all, that the truth alone might make an impression upon human hearts.

Christ's contentment in any position provoked His brethren. They could not explain the reason of His peace and serenity; and no persuasion of theirs could lead Him to enter into any plans or arrangements which bore the impression of commonness or of guilt. On every occasion He would turn from them, plainly stating that they would mislead others, and were unworthy of the sons of Abraham. He must set such an example that little children, the younger members of the Lord's family, would see nothing in His life or character to justify any evil deed. You are altogether too particular and peculiar, said the members of his own family. Why not be as other children? But this could not be; for Christ was to be a sign and a wonder from His youth, as far as strict obedience and integrity were concerned.

—*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 401.

Every act of transgression, every neglect or rejection of the grace of Christ, is reacting upon yourself; it is hardening the heart, depraving the will, benumbing the understanding, and not only making you less inclined to yield, but less capable of yielding, to the tender pleading of God's Holy Spirit.

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Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel. Every sinful indulgence strengthens the soul's aversion to God. The man who manifests an infidel hardihood, or a stolid indifference to divine truth, is but reaping the harvest of that which he has himself sown. In all the Bible there is not a more fearful warning against trifling with evil than the words of the wise man that the sinner "shall be holden with the cords of his sins." Proverbs 5:22.

—*Steps to Christ*, pp. 33, 34.

Monday, September 19

Despised and Rejected of Men

A human body and a human mind were [Christ's]. He was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He was subjected to poverty from his first entrance into the world. He was subject to disappointment and trial in his own home, among his own brethren. He was not surrounded, as in the heavenly courts, with pure and lovely characters. He was compassed with difficulties. He came into our world to maintain a pure, sinless character, and to refute Satan's lie that it was not possible for human beings to keep the law of God. Christ came to live the law in his human character in just that way in which all may live the law in human nature if they will do as Christ was doing. He had inspired holy men of old to write for the benefit of man: "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me" (Isaiah 27:5).

—*Selected Messages, book 3, pp. 129, 130.*

[The] scribes and Pharisees . . . were filled with envy because the people listened so attentively to the words of this new Teacher. They determined to break His hold upon the multitudes. They began by attacking His character, saying that He was born in sin, and that He cast out devils through the prince of the devils. Thus were fulfilled the words "They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25; cf. Psalm 69:4). The Jewish leaders maligned and persecuted the One who is chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely.

As we separate from the world and its customs, we shall meet with the displeasure of worldlings. The world hated the One who was the very embodiment of virtue, because He was better than they were. The servant is not greater than his Lord. If our ways please God, the world will hate us. If the Majesty of heaven came to this world, and endured a life of humiliation and a death of shame, why should we shrink back because obedience involves a cross? If He was persecuted, can we expect better treatment? . . . I point you to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He will comfort and sustain all who come to Him for help.

—*The Upward Look, p. 325.*

The tears of Jesus were not in anticipation of His own suffering. Just before Him was Gethsemane, where soon the horror of a great darkness would overshadow Him. . . . Yet it was not because of these reminders of His cruel death that the Redeemer wept and groaned in anguish of spirit. His was no selfish sorrow. The thought of His own agony did not intimidate that noble, self-sacrificing soul. It was the sight of Jerusalem that pierced the heart of Jesus—Jerusalem that had rejected the Son of God and scorned His love, that refused to be convinced by His mighty miracles, and was about to take His life. He saw what she was in her guilt of rejecting her Redeemer, and what she might have been had she accepted Him who alone could heal her wound. He had come to save her; how could He give her up?

—*The Desire of Ages, p. 576.*

Tuesday, September 20

Jesus in Gethsemane

When in the garden of Gethsemane, the cup of suffering was placed in the Saviour's hand, the thought came to Him, Should He drink it or should He leave the world to perish in sin? His suffering was too great for human comprehension. As the agony of soul came upon Him, "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). The mysterious cup trembled in His hand. In this awful crisis, when everything was at stake, the mighty angel who stands in God's presence, came to the side of Christ, not to take the cup from His hand, but to strengthen Him to drink it, with the assurance of the Father's love.

Christ drank of the cup, and this is the reason that sinners can come to God and find pardon and grace. But those who share in Christ's glory must share also in His suffering. . . .

Shall we take up the cross, and intelligently understand what it means to follow Christ, practicing self-denial at every step?

—*This Day With God*, p. 49.

In that thick darkness God's presence was hidden. He makes darkness His pavilion, and conceals His glory from human eyes. God and His holy angels were beside the cross. The Father was with His Son. Yet His presence was not revealed. Had His glory flashed forth from the cloud, every human beholder would have been destroyed. And in that dreadful hour Christ was not to be comforted with the Father's presence. He trod the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with Him.

In the thick darkness, God veiled the last human agony of His Son. All who had seen Christ in His suffering had been convicted of His divinity. That face, once beheld by humanity, was never forgotten. As the face of Cain expressed his guilt as a murderer, so the face of Christ revealed innocence, serenity, benevolence,—the image of God. But His accusers would not give heed to the signet of heaven. Through long hours of agony Christ had been gazed upon by the jeering multitude. Now He was mercifully hidden by the mantle of God.

—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 753, 754.

With untold love our God has loved us, and our love awakens toward Him as we comprehend something of the length and breadth and depth and height of this love that passeth knowledge. By the revelation of the attractive loveliness of Christ, by the knowledge of His love expressed to us while we were yet sinners, the stubborn heart is melted and subdued, and the sinner is transformed and becomes a child of heaven. God does not employ compulsory measures; love is the agent which He uses to expel sin from the heart. By it He changes pride into humility, and enmity and unbelief into love and faith. . . .

God is love. Like rays of light from the sun, love and light and joy flow out from Him to all His creatures. It is His nature to give. His very life is the outflow of unselfish love.

—*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 76, 77.

Wednesday, September 21

The Crucified God

In yielding up His precious life, Christ was not upheld by triumphant joy. All was oppressive gloom. It was not the dread of death that weighed upon Him. It was not the pain and ignominy of the cross that caused His inexpressible agony. Christ was the prince of sufferers; but His suffering was from a sense of the malignity of sin, a knowledge that through familiarity with evil, man had become blinded to its enormity. Christ saw how deep is the hold of sin upon the human heart, how few would be willing to break from its power. He knew that without help from God, humanity must perish, and He saw multitudes perishing within reach of abundant help.

—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 752, 753.

As Jesus hung upon the cross and cried, “It is finished,” the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom, to signify that God would no longer meet with the priests in the temple, to accept their sacrifices and ordinances, and also to show that the partition wall between the Jews and the Gentiles was broken down. Jesus had made an offering of Himself for both, and if saved at all, both must believe in Him as the only offering for sin, the Saviour of the world.

When the soldier pierced the side of Jesus as He hung upon the cross, there came out two distinct streams, one of blood, the other of water. The blood was to wash away the sins of those who should believe in His name, and the water was to represent that living water which is obtained from Jesus to give life to the believer.

—*Early Writings*, p. 209.

I saw Christ in the midst of a large company of people. He was seeking to impress their minds with His teachings. But He was despised and rejected by them. Men were heaping upon Him abuse and shame. My distress was very great as I looked upon the scene. . . .

There was presented to me Christ’s agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the mysterious cup trembled in the Redeemer’s hand. “Father, if it be possible,” He prayed, “let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Matthew 26:39. As He pleaded with the Father, great drops of blood fell from His face to the ground. The elements of darkness were gathered about the Saviour to discourage His soul. . . .

How few there are who realize that all this was borne for them individually! How few who say: “It was for me, that I might form a character for the future immortal life.”

As these things were presented to me so vividly, I thought, I shall never be able to present this subject before the people as it is;” and I have given you only a faint representation of what was shown me. As I have thought of that cup trembling in the hands of Christ; as I have realized that He might have refused to drink, and left the world to perish in its sin, I have pledged that every energy of my life should be devoted to the work of winning souls to Him.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 101–103.

Thursday, September 22

The Suffering God

All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.

. . . He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God.

—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 753.

What is our path to heaven? Is it a road with every inviting convenience? No, it is a path that is narrow and apparently inconvenient; it is a path of conflict, of trial, of tribulation and suffering. Our Captain, Jesus Christ, has hid nothing from us in regard to the battles we are to fight. He opens the map before us and shows us the way. "Strive," He says, "to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24). "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Matthew 7:13). "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). The apostle echoes the words of Christ, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom" (Acts 14:22). Well, is it the discouraging aspect we are to keep before the mind's eye? . . .

[Jesus is] the life of every grace, the life of every promise, the life of every ordinance, the life of every blessing. Jesus is the substance, the glory and fragrance, the very life itself. "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Then the royal path cast up the ransomed to walk in is not discouraging darkness. Our pilgrimage would indeed be lonely and painful were it not for Jesus. "I will not," He says, "leave you comfortless" (John 14:18). Then let us gather every registered promise. Let us repeat them by day and meditate upon them in the night season, and be happy. . . .

Is not this indeed a royal path we are traveling, cast up for the ransomed of the Lord to walk in? Can there be provided a better path? A safer way? No! No! Then let us practice the instruction given. Let us see our Saviour as our refuge, as our shield on our right hand to defend us from the arrows of Satan.

—*Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 243–245.

Friday, September 23

For Further Reading

Lift Him Up, “Conqueror Over the Power of Darkness,” p. 235;

In Heavenly Places, “No Exemption From Sorrow,” p. 268.