

The Beginning of the Gospel

Sabbath afternoon, June 29

Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul, and all the writers who have borne testimony in regard to the life and ministry of the Saviour? Why could not one of the disciples have written a complete record and thus have given us a connected account of Christ's earthly life? Why does one writer bring in points that another does not mention? Why, if these points are essential, did not all these writers mention them? It is because the minds of men differ. Not all comprehend things in exactly the same way. Certain Scripture truths appeal much more strongly to the minds of some than of others.

The same principle applies to speakers. One dwells at considerable length on points that others would pass by quickly or not mention at all. The whole truth is presented more clearly by several than by one. The Gospels differ, but the records of all blend in one harmonious whole.—Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students, p. 432.

Mark's mother was a convert to the Christian religion, and her home at Jerusalem was an asylum for the disciples. There they were always sure of a welcome and a season of rest. It was during one of these visits of the apostles to his mother's home, that Mark proposed to Paul and Barnabas that he should accompany them on their missionary tour. He felt the favor of God in his heart and longed to devote himself entirely to the work of the gospel ministry.—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 166.

It was here [in Pamphylia] that Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord's work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way. He had labored with success under favorable circumstances; but now, amidst the opposition and perils that so often beset the pioneer worker, he failed to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross. He had yet to learn to face danger and persecution and adversity with a brave heart. As the apostles advanced, and still greater difficulties were apprehended, Mark was intimidated and, losing all courage, refused to go farther and returned to Jerusalem.—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 169.

Christian life is more than many take it to be. It does not consist wholly in gentleness, patience, meekness, and kindliness. These graces are essential; but there is need also of courage, force, energy, and perseverance. The path that Christ marks out is a narrow, self-denying path. To enter that path and press on through difficulties and discouragements requires men who are more than weaklings. . . .

Those who would win success [in missionary service] must be courageous and hopeful. They should cultivate not only the passive but the active virtues. While they are to give the soft answer that turns away wrath, they must possess the courage of a hero to resist evil. With the charity that endures all things, they need the force of character that will make their influence a positive power.—The Ministry of Healing, p. 497.

Sunday, June 30

The Failed Missionary

Paul [judged] Mark unfavorably, and even severely, for a time. Barnabas, on the other hand, was inclined to excuse him because of his inexperience. He felt anxious that Mark should not abandon the ministry, for he saw in him qualifications that would fit him to be a useful worker for Christ. In after years his solicitude in Mark's behalf was richly rewarded, for the young man gave himself unreservedly to the Lord and to the work of proclaiming the gospel message in difficult fields. Under the blessing of God, and the wise training of Barnabas, he developed into a valuable worker.—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 170.

To every man God has given a work to do in connection with His kingdom. Everyone who professes the name of Christ is to be an earnest, disinterested worker, ready to defend the principles of righteousness. Every soul should take an active part in advancing the cause of God. Whatever our calling, as Christians we have a work to do in making Christ known to the world. We are to be missionaries, having for our chief aim the winning of souls to Christ.

To His church God has committed the work of diffusing light and bearing the message of His love. Our work is not to condemn, not to denounce, but to draw with Christ, beseeching men to be reconciled to God. We are to encourage souls, to attract them, and thus win them to the Saviour. If this is not our interest, if we withhold from God the service of heart and life, we are robbing Him of influence, of time, of money and effort. In failing to benefit our fellow men, we rob God of the glory that should flow to Him through the conversion of souls. . . .

Let those who desire to work for God begin at home, in their own household, in their own neighborhood, among their own friends. Here they will find a favorable missionary field. This home missionary work is a test, revealing their ability or inability for service in a wider field.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, pp. 427, 428.

Christ and Him crucified should become the theme of our thoughts and stir the deepest emotions of our souls. The true followers of Christ will appreciate the great salvation which He has wrought for them; and wherever He leads the way, they will follow. They will consider it a privilege to bear whatever burdens Christ may lay upon them. It is through the cross alone that we can estimate the worth of the human soul. Such is the value of men for whom Christ died that the Father is satisfied with the infinite price which He pays for the salvation of man in yielding up His own Son to die for their redemption. . . .

What a responsible position, to unite with the Redeemer of the world in the salvation of men! This work calls for self-denial, sacrifice, and benevolence, for perseverance, courage, and faith.—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, pp. 634, 635.

Monday, July 1

A Second Chance

Barnabas was ready to go with Paul, but wished to take with them Mark, who had again decided to devote himself to the ministry. To this Paul objected. He “thought not good to take . . . with them” one who during their first missionary journey had left them in a time of need. He was not inclined to excuse Mark’s weakness in deserting the work for the safety and comforts of home. He urged that one with so little stamina was unfitted for a work requiring patience, self-denial, bravery, devotion, faith, and a willingness to sacrifice, if need be, even life itself. So sharp was the contention that Paul and Barnabas separated, the latter following out his convictions and taking Mark with him. “So Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.”—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 202.

Since the earlier years of his profession of faith, Mark’s Christian experience had deepened. As he had studied more closely the life and death of Christ he had obtained clearer views of the Saviour’s mission, its toils and conflicts. Reading in the scars in Christ’s hands and feet the marks of His service for humanity, and the length to which self-abnegation leads to save the lost and perishing, Mark had become willing to follow the Master in the path of self-sacrifice. Now, sharing the lot of Paul the prisoner, he understood better than ever before that it is infinite gain to win Christ, infinite loss to win the world and lose the soul for whose redemption the blood of Christ was shed. In the face of severe trial and adversity, Mark continued steadfast, a wise and beloved helper of the apostle.—The Acts of the Apostles, p. 455.

When God opens the way for the accomplishment of a certain work and gives assurance of success, the chosen instrumentality must do all in his power to bring about the promised result. In proportion to the enthusiasm and perseverance with which the work is carried forward will be the success given. God can work miracles for His people only as they act their part with untiring energy. He calls for men of devotion to His work, men of moral courage, with ardent love for souls, and with a zeal that never flags. Such workers will find no task too arduous, no prospect too hopeless; they will labor on, undaunted, until apparent defeat is turned into glorious victory. Not even prison walls nor the martyr’s stake beyond, will cause them to swerve from their purpose of laboring together with God for the upbuilding of His kingdom.—Prophets and Kings, p. 263.

Tuesday, July 2

The Messenger

The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption. In order fully to carry out this plan, it was decided that Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, should give Himself an offering for sin. What line can measure the depth of this love? God would make it impossible for man to say that He could have done more. With Christ He gave all the resources of heaven, that nothing might be wanting in the plan for man's uplifting. Here is love—the contemplation of which should fill the soul with inexpressible gratitude! Oh, what love, what matchless love! The contemplation of this love will cleanse the soul from all selfishness. It will lead the disciple to deny self, take up the cross, and follow the Redeemer.—Counsels on Health, p. 222.

God had promised [John] a sign by which he should know the Lamb of God. That sign was given as the heavenly dove rested upon Jesus, and the glory of God shone round about Him. John reached forth his hand, pointing to Jesus, and with a loud voice cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"

John informed his disciples that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world. As his work was closing, he taught his disciples to look to Jesus, and follow Him as the Great Teacher. John's life was sorrowful and self-denying. He heralded the first advent of Christ, but was not permitted to witness His miracles, and enjoy the power manifested by Him. When Jesus should establish Himself as a teacher, John knew that he himself must die. His voice was seldom heard, except in the wilderness. His life was lonely. He did not cling to his father's family, to enjoy their society, but left them in order to fulfill his mission.—Early Writings, pp. 153, 154.

As a people, we must prepare the way of the Lord, under the overruling guidance of the Holy Spirit, for the spread of the gospel in its purity. The stream of living water is to deepen and widen in its course. In all fields, nigh and afar off, men will be called from the plow and from the more common commercial business vocations, that largely occupy the mind, and will become educated in connection with men who have had experience—men who understand the truth. Through most wonderful workings of God, mountains of difficulty will be removed and cast into the sea. . . .

As this call is obeyed, the message that means so much to the dwellers on the earth will be heard and understood. Men will know what is truth. Onward, and still onward, will the work advance. And marked events of Providence will be seen and recognized in judgments and in blessings. The truth will bear away the victory.—Letter 230, July 5, 1906, to the elders of the Battle Creek Church.

Wednesday, July 3

Jesus' Baptism

When Christ bowed on the banks of Jordan, after His baptism, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended in the form of a dove, like burnished gold, and encircled Him with its glory; and the voice of God from the highest heaven was heard, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The prayer of Christ in man's behalf opened the gates of heaven, and the Father had responded, accepting the petition for the fallen race. Jesus prayed as our substitute and surety, and now the human family may find access to the Father through the merits of His well-beloved Son. This earth, because of transgression, had been struck off from the continent of heaven. Communication had ceased between man and his Maker; but the way has been opened so that he may return to the Father's house. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life." The gate of heaven has been left ajar, and the radiance from the throne of God shines into the hearts of those who love Him, even though they dwell in this sin-cursed earth. The light that encircled the divine Son of God will fall upon the pathway of all who follow in His footsteps. There is no reason for discouragement. The promises of God are sure and steadfast.—My Life Today, p. 260.

Christ's prayer on the banks of the Jordan includes everyone who will believe in Him. The promise that you are accepted in the Beloved comes to you. Hold it with the grip of unyielding faith. God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This means that through the dark shadow which Satan has thrown athwart your pathway Christ has cleaved the way for you to the throne of the infinite God. He has laid hold of almighty power, and you are accepted in the Beloved.—Lift Him Up, p. 109.

While in the wilderness, Christ fasted, but He was insensible to hunger. Engaged in constant prayer to His Father for a preparation to resist the adversary, Christ did not feel the pangs of hunger. He spent the time in earnest prayer, shut in with God. It was as if He were in the presence of His Father. He sought for strength to meet the foe, for the assurance that He would receive grace to carry out all that He had undertaken in behalf of humanity. The thought of the warfare before Him made Him oblivious to all else, and His soul was fed with the bread of life, just as today those tempted souls will be fed who go to God for aid. . . . He did not realize any sense of hunger until the forty days of His fast were ended. . . .

Christ knew that His Father would supply Him food when it would gratify Him to do so. He would not in this severe ordeal, when hunger pressed Him beyond measure, prematurely diminish one particle of the trial allotted to Him by exercising His divine power.—Ellen G. White Comments, in The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1080.

Thursday, July 4

The Gospel According to Jesus

The gospel message, as given by the Saviour Himself, was based on the prophecies. The "time" which He declared to be fulfilled was the period made known by the angel Gabriel to Daniel. . . . "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks" (Daniel 9:25), sixty-nine weeks, or four hundred and eighty-three years. The commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, as completed by the decree of Artaxerxes Longimanus (see Ezra 6:14; 7:1, 9, margin), went into effect in the autumn of 457 B.C. From this time four hundred and eighty-three years extend to the autumn of A.D. 27. According to the prophecy, this period was to reach to the Messiah, the Anointed One. In A.D. 27, Jesus at His baptism received the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and soon afterward began His ministry. Then the message was proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled."—God's Amazing Grace, p. 12.

"I am the Good Shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." "I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep." . . .

This figure the prophet Isaiah had applied to the Messiah's mission, in the comforting words, "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! . . . He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." Isaiah 40:9–11. . . .

Christ applied these prophecies to Himself, and He showed the contrast between His own character and that of the leaders in Israel. The Pharisees had just driven one from the fold, because he dared to bear witness to the power of Christ. They had cut off a soul whom the True Shepherd was drawing to Himself. In this they had shown themselves ignorant of the work committed to them, and unworthy of their trust as shepherds of the flock. Jesus now set before them the contrast between them and the Good Shepherd, and He pointed to Himself as the real keeper of the Lord's flock. Before doing this, however, He speaks of Himself under another figure.—The Desire of Ages, pp. 476, 477.

The Lord is . . . willing to work through human efforts now, and to accomplish great things through weak instrumentalities. It is essential to have an intelligent knowledge of the truth; for how else could we meet its wily opponents? The Bible must be studied, not alone for the doctrines it teaches, but for its practical lessons. You should never be surprised, you should never be without your armor on. Be prepared for any emergency, for any call of duty. Be waiting, watching for every opportunity to present the truth, familiar with the prophecies, familiar with the lessons of Christ. But do not trust in well-prepared arguments. Argument alone is not enough. God must be sought on your knees; you must go forth to meet the people through the power and influence of His Spirit.—Ellen G. White Comments, in The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 1003.

Friday, July 5

For Further Reading

Selected Messages, "John Called to a Special Work," book 1, pp. 411, 412.

The Acts of the Apostles, "Heralds of the Gospel," pp. 166–176.