

Lesson 1

God Loves Freely

Sabbath Afternoon, December 28

Three times after His resurrection, Christ tested Peter. “Simon, son of Jonas,” He said, “lovest thou me more than these?” . . .

This heart-searching question was necessary in the case of Peter, and it is necessary in our case. The work of restoration can never be thorough unless the roots of evil are reached. Again and again the shoots have been clipped, while the root of bitterness has been left to spring up and defile many; but the very depth of the hidden evil must be reached, the moral senses must be judged, and judged again, in the light of the divine presence. The daily life will testify whether or not the work is genuine.

When, the third time, Christ said to Peter, “Lovest thou me?” the probe reached the soul center. Self-judged, Peter fell upon the Rock, saying, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” —Ellen G. White *Comments, in The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 5, pp. 1151, 1152.*

The heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift. The Saviour’s life and death and intercession, the ministry of angels, the pleading of the Spirit, the Father working above and through all, the unceasing interest of heavenly beings,—all are enlisted in behalf of man’s redemption.

Oh, let us contemplate the amazing sacrifice that has been made for us! Let us try to appreciate the labor and energy that Heaven is expending to reclaim the lost, and bring them back to the Father’s house. Motives stronger, and agencies more powerful, could never be brought into operation; the exceeding rewards for right-doing, the enjoyment of heaven, the society of the angels, the communion and love of God and His Son, the elevation and extension of all our powers throughout eternal ages—are these not mighty incentives and encouragements to urge us to give the heart’s loving service to our Creator and Redeemer? —*Steps to Christ, p. 21.*

All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts . . . are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself can never fully reveal it. —*Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 740.*

Sunday, December 29

Beyond Reasonable Expectations

Christ, the Light of the world, veiled the dazzling splendor of His divinity and came to live as a man among men, that they might, without being consumed, become acquainted with their Creator. . . .

Christ came to teach human beings what God desires them to know. In the heavens above, in the earth, in the broad waters of the ocean, we see the handiwork of God. All created things testify to His power, His wisdom, His love. Yet not from the stars or the ocean or the cataract can we learn of the personality of God as it was revealed in Christ.

God saw that a clearer revelation than nature was needed to portray both His personality and His character. He sent His Son into the world to manifest, so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God. —*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 419.

[To] hearts that have become purified through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, all is changed. These can know God. Moses was hid in the cleft of the rock when the glory of the Lord was revealed to him; and it is when we are hid in Christ that we behold the love of God. . . .

By faith we behold Him here and now. In our daily experience we discern His goodness and compassion in the manifestation of His providence. We recognize Him in the character of His Son. The Holy Spirit takes the truth concerning God and Him whom He hath sent, and opens it to the understanding and to the heart. The pure in heart see God in a new and endearing relation, as their Redeemer; and while they discern the purity and loveliness of His character, they long to reflect His image. They see Him as a Father longing to embrace a repenting son, and their hearts are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory. —*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 26.

It was John's deep love for Christ which led him always to desire to be close by His side. The Saviour loved all the Twelve, but John's was the most receptive spirit. He was younger than the others, and with more of the child's confiding trust he opened his heart to Jesus. Thus he came more into sympathy with Christ, and through him the Saviour's deepest spiritual teaching was communicated to the people. . . .

John could talk of the Father's love as no other of the disciples could. He revealed to his fellow men that which he felt in his own soul, representing in his character the attributes of God. The glory of the Lord was expressed in his face. The beauty of holiness which had transformed him shone with a Christlike radiance from his countenance. In adoration and love he beheld the Saviour until likeness to Christ and fellowship with Him became his one desire, and in his character was reflected the character of his Master. —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 545.

Monday, December 30

Unrequited Love

The Lord did not give Israel up without first doing all that could be done to lead them back to their allegiance to Him. Through long, dark years when ruler after ruler stood up in bold defiance of Heaven and led Israel deeper and still deeper into idolatry, God sent message after message to His backslidden people. Through His prophets He gave them every opportunity to stay the tide of apostasy and to return to Him. During the years that were to follow the rending of the kingdom, Elijah and Elisha were to live and labor, and the tender appeals of Hosea and Amos and Obadiah were to be heard in the land. Never was the kingdom of Israel to be left without noble witnesses to the mighty power of God to save from sin. —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 107, 108.

The love of God is a golden chain, binding finite human beings to Himself. This love passes our knowledge. Human science can not explain it. Human wisdom can not fathom it. Parents love their children, but the love of God is larger, broader, deeper, than human love can possibly be. All the paternal love that has come down from generation to generation, through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness that have opened in the sons of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean, when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue can not utter it; pen can not portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in an effort to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages, and yet you can never fully comprehend the length and breadth and depth and height, of the love of God. . . .

The Lord's children are never absent from His mind. —“*The Love of God*,” *Signs of the Times*, July 13, 1904.

Satan is determined that men shall not see the love of God which led Him to give His only-begotten Son to save a lost race; for it is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance. O how shall we succeed in setting forth before the world the deep, precious love of God? In no other way we can compass it except by exclaiming, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). Let us say to sinners, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). By presenting Jesus as the representative of the Father, we shall be able to dispel the shadow that Satan has cast upon our pathway, in order that we shall not see the mercy and inexpressible love of God as manifested in Jesus Christ. Look at the cross of Calvary. It is a standing pledge of the boundless love, the measureless mercy of the heavenly Father. —*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 156.

Tuesday, December 31

Love Freely Given

God's created works testify to His love and power. He has called the world into being, with all that it contains. God is a lover of the beautiful; and in the world which He has fitted up for us He has not only given us everything necessary for our comfort, but He has filled the heavens and the earth with beauty. We see His love and care in the rich fields of autumn, and His smile in the glad sunshine. His hand has made the castle-like rocks and the towering mountains. The lofty trees grow at His command; He has spread earth's green velvet carpet and dotted it with shrubs and flowers. . . .

The same creative energy that brought the world into existence is still exerted in upholding the universe and continuing the operations of nature. The hand of God guides the planets in their orderly march through the heavens. It is not because of inherent power that year by year the earth continues her motion round the sun and produces her bounties. The word of God controls the elements. He covers the heavens with clouds and prepares rain for the earth. He makes the valleys fruitful and "grass to grow upon the mountains;" Psalm 147:8. —*Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 185.

Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped Their hands in a solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race. This pledge Christ has fulfilled. When upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished," He addressed the Father. The compact had been fully carried out. Now He declares: Father, it is finished. I have done Thy will, O My God. I have completed the work of redemption. If Thy justice is satisfied, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am" (John 19:30; 17:24).

The voice of God is heard proclaiming that justice is satisfied. Satan is vanquished. Christ's toiling, struggling ones on earth are "accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Before the heavenly angels and the representatives of unfallen worlds, they are declared justified. . . .

Songs of triumph mingle with the music from angel harps, till heaven seems to overflow with joy and praise. Love has conquered. The lost is found. —*Lift Him Up*, p. 103.

Christ's death proves God's great love for man. It is our pledge of salvation. To remove the cross from the Christian would be like blotting the sun from the sky. The cross brings us near to God, reconciling us to Him. With the relenting compassion of a father's love, Jehovah looks upon the suffering that His Son endured in order to save the race from eternal death, and accepts us in the Beloved. . . .

Through the cross we learn that the heavenly Father loves us with a love that is infinite. —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 210.

Wednesday, January 1

Many Are Called, but Few Are Chosen

Every man is free to choose what power he will have to rule over him. None have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they can find deliverance in Christ. The demoniac, in place of prayer, could utter only the words of Satan; yet the heart's unspoken appeal was heard. No cry from a soul in need, though it fail of utterance in words, will be unheeded. Those who will consent to enter into covenant relation with the God of heaven are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature. They are invited by the Saviour, "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." Isaiah 27:5. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 258.

The Lord God has provided a banquet for the whole human race. It is represented in the parable as a great supper where there is provided a festival for every soul. All connected with this supper may enjoy the heavenly feast, which is the gospel. This feast is open to all who will receive it. All are invited and urged to come.

All who are partakers of the wedding feast, the gospel feast, by this act say that they have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour. They wear His distinguishing dress. They have accepted the truth as it is in Jesus, which is the robe of Christ's righteousness. Only those do honor to Christ who accept the invitation, "Come, for all things are now ready; come to the marriage supper of the Lamb." These put on the white linen, the clean, pure character, showing that they no longer live their old citizen life that they lived in their ignorance. Their speech is changed. Their conversation is in altogether another line. —*The Upward Look*, p. 304.

We should consider the great sacrifice that was made in our behalf to purchase for us the robe of righteousness woven in the loom of heaven. He has invited us to the wedding feast, and has provided for every one of us the wedding garment. The robe of righteousness has been purchased at infinite cost, and how daring is the insult to Heaven when one presents himself as a candidate for entrance at the wedding feast when wearing his own citizen's dress of self-righteousness! How greatly he dishonors God, openly showing contempt for the sacrifice made on Calvary!

No one will taste of the marriage supper of the Lamb who has not on a wedding garment. But John writes, ". . . He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." Then, before it is eternally too late, let each one go to the heavenly Merchantman for the white raiment, the eyesalve, the gold tried in the fire, and the oil of heavenly grace. —*That I May Know Him*, p. 264.

Thursday, January 2

Crucified for Us

Christ did not come as the Jews expected. He did not come in a manner to glorify them as a nation. . . . Christ's message was, "The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." The Jews refused to receive Christ, because He did not come in accordance with their expectations. The ideas of finite men were held as infallible, because hoary with age.

This is the danger to which the church is now exposed. . . . [Many] are not willing to be deprived of the garments of their own self-righteousness. They are not willing to exchange their own righteousness, which is unrighteousness, for the righteousness of Christ, which is pure, unadulterated truth. The Holy Spirit flatters no man, neither does it work according to the devising of any man. Finite, sinful men are not to work the Holy Spirit. When it shall come as a reprover, through any human agent whom God shall choose, it is man's place to hear and obey its voice. —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 64.

Christ died for every son and daughter of Adam; and when the Son of God has expressed such amazing love, making this great sacrifice for the sinner, in order that through faith in Him he need not perish but have everlasting life, how can the subject of this great love be indifferent and stand in sin and disobedience, and not heartily confess Christ without one moment's delay? How can anyone love to do evil? . . . In doing the will of Him who loves the world, and who gave His only-begotten Son to die for them, they strengthen every faculty of the soul, and increase their own happiness and peace.

The Lord has greatly honored men, by giving Jesus Christ to recover them from Satan's claims. . . . [Jesus has said,] "My grace is sufficient for thee." Everyone who seeks to do well in his own finite strength, will find his efforts a failure; but those who accept Christ by faith, will find Him a personal Saviour. —*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 291, 292.

[Christ's] great sacrifice was not made in order to create in the Father's heart a love for man, not to make Him willing to save. No, no! "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son." John 3:16. The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us. Christ was the medium through which He could pour out His infinite love upon a fallen world. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. God suffered with His Son. In the agony of Gethsemane, the death of Calvary, the heart of Infinite Love paid the price of our redemption. . . .

None but the Son of God could accomplish our redemption; for only He who was in the bosom of the Father could declare Him. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father's love to lost humanity. —*Steps to Christ*, pp. 13, 14.

Friday, January 3

For Further Reading

The Acts of the Apostles, "A Faithful Under-Shepherd," pp. 114–118;
The Story of Redemption, "Man's Freedom of Choice," pp. 37–39.