

Ultimate Loyalty: Worship in a War Zone

Sabbath Afternoon, November 8

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). . . . It is not alone in denying the existence of God or in bowing down to idols of wood and stone that this first commandment is broken. By many who profess to be followers of Christ, its principles are infringed, but the Lord of heaven does not acknowledge those as His children who are cherishing in their hearts anything that takes the place which God alone should hold. With many the gratification of appetite holds sway, while with others dress and love of the world are given the first place in the heart. . . .

God has given us many things in this life upon which to bestow our affections, but when we carry to excess that which in itself is lawful we become idolaters. . . . Anything that separates our affections from God and lessens our interest in eternal things is an idol. Those who use the precious time given them by God—time that has been purchased at an infinite cost—in embellishing their homes for display, in following the fashions and customs of the world, are not only robbing their own souls of spiritual food, but are failing to give God His due. The time thus spent in the gratification of selfish desires might be employed in obtaining a knowledge of the Word of God, in cultivating our talents, that we might render intelligent service to our Creator. . . . God will not share a divided heart. If the world absorbs our attention, He cannot reign supreme. If this diminishes our devotion for God, it is idolatry in His eyes. . . .

“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). When our hearts are tuned to praise our Maker, not only in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs but also in our lives, we shall live in communion with Heaven. . . . There will be gratitude in the heart and in the home, in private as well as in public devotion. This constitutes the true worship of God. —*That I May Know Him*, p. 322.

Thank God for the bright pictures which He has presented to us. Let us group together the blessed assurances of His love, that we may look upon them continually: The Son of God leaving His Father’s throne, clothing His divinity with humanity, that He might rescue man from the power of Satan; His triumph in our behalf, opening heaven to men, revealing to human vision the presence chamber where the Deity unveils His glory; the fallen race uplifted from the pit of ruin into which sin had plunged it, and brought again into connection with the infinite God, and having endured the divine test through faith in our Redeemer, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and exalted to His throne—these are the pictures which God would have us contemplate. . . .

Angels are listening to hear what kind of report you are bearing to the world about your heavenly Master. Let your conversation be of Him who liveth to make intercession for you before the Father. When you take the hand of a friend, let praise to God be on your lips and in your heart. This will attract his thoughts to Jesus. —*Steps to Christ*, pp. 118, 119.

Covenant First

A short distance from Jordan the Hebrews made their first encampment in Canaan. Here Joshua “circumcised the children of Israel;” “and the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover.” The suspension of the rite of circumcision since the rebellion at Kadesh had been a constant witness to Israel that their covenant with God, of which it was the appointed symbol, had been broken. And the discontinuance of the Passover, the memorial of their deliverance from Egypt, had been an evidence of the Lord’s displeasure at their desire to return to the land of bondage. Now, how-ever, the years of rejection were ended. Once more God acknowledged Israel as His people, and the sign of the covenant was restored. The rite of circumcision was performed upon all the people who had been born in the wilderness. And the Lord declared to Joshua, “This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you,” and in allusion to this the place of their encampment was called Gilgal, “a rolling away,” or “rolling off.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 485.

Many who passed through the Red Sea when they were children, now, by a similar miracle, crossed over Jordan, men of war, equipped for battle. After the host of Israel had all passed over, Joshua commanded the priests to come up out of the river. When they, bearing the ark of the covenant, stood safe upon the farther shore, God removed His mighty hand, and the accumulated waters rushed down, a mighty cataract, in the natural channel of the stream. Jordan rolled on, a resistless flood, overflowing all its banks.

But before the priests had come up out of the river, that this wonderful miracle might never be forgotten, the Lord bade Joshua select men of note from each tribe to take up stones from the spot in the river bed where the priests had stood, and bear them upon their shoulders to Gilgal, and there erect a monument in remembrance of the fact that God had caused Israel to pass over Jordan upon dry land. This would be a continual reminder of the miracle that the Lord had wrought for them. As years passed on, their children would inquire concerning the monument, and again and again they would recount to them this wonderful history, till it would be indelibly impressed upon their minds to the latest generation.

When all the kings of the Amorites and the kings of the Canaanites heard that the Lord had stayed the waters of Jordan before the children of Israel, their hearts melted with fear. The Israelites had slain two of the kings of Moab, and their miraculous passage over the swollen and impetuous Jordan filled the people with great terror. Joshua then circumcised all the people that had been born in the wilderness. After this ceremony they kept the Passover in the plains of Jericho. “And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you.” —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 158.

Passover

On the fourteenth day of the month, at even, the Passover was celebrated, its solemn, impressive ceremonies commemorating the deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and pointing forward to the sacrifice that should deliver from the bondage of sin. When the Saviour yielded up His life on Calvary, the significance of the Passover ceased, and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted as a memorial of the same event of which the Passover had been a type.

The Passover was followed by the seven day's feast of unleavened bread. The first and the seventh day were days of holy convocation, when no servile work was to be performed. On the second day of the feast, the first fruits of the year's harvest were presented before God. Barley was the earliest grain in Palestine, and at the opening of the feast it was beginning to ripen. A sheaf of this grain was waved by the priest before the altar of God, as an acknowledgment that all was His. Not until this ceremony had been performed was the harvest to be gathered. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 539.

The Passover was to be both commemorative and typical, not only pointing back to the deliverance from Egypt, but forward to the greater deliverance which Christ was to accomplish in freeing His people from the bondage of sin. The sacrificial lamb represents "the Lamb of God," in whom is our only hope of salvation. Says the apostle, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." 1 Corinthians 5:7. It was not enough that the paschal lamb be slain; its blood must be sprinkled upon the doorposts; so the merits of Christ's blood must be applied to the soul. We must believe, not only that He died for the world, but that He died for us individually. We must appropriate to ourselves the virtue of the atoning sacrifice. . . .

The lamb was to be prepared whole, not a bone of it being broken: so not a bone was to be broken of the Lamb of God, who was to die for us. John 19:36. Thus was also represented the completeness of Christ's sacrifice. . . .

The lamb was to be eaten with bitter herbs, as pointing back to the bitterness of the bondage in Egypt. So when we feed upon Christ, it should be with contrition of heart, because of our sins. The use of unleavened bread also was significant. It was expressly enjoined in the law of the Passover, and as strictly observed by the Jews in their practice, that no leaven should be found in their houses during the feast. In like manner the leaven of sin must be put away from all who would receive life and nourishment from Christ. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 277.

Altars of Renewal

All who will come to the Word of God for guidance, with humble, inquiring minds, determined to know the terms of salvation, will understand what saith the Scriptures. But those who bring to the investigation of the Word a spirit which it does not approve will take away from the search a spirit which it has not imparted. The Lord will not speak to a mind that is unconcerned. He wastes not His instruction on one who is willingly irreverent or polluted. But the tempter educates every mind that yields itself to his suggestions, and is willing to make of none effect God's holy law.

We need to humble our hearts, and with sincerity and reverence search the Word of life; for that mind alone that is humble and contrite can see light. The heart, the mind, the soul, must be prepared to receive light. There must be silence in the soul. The thoughts must be brought into captivity to Jesus Christ. The boastful self-knowledge and self-sufficiency must stand rebuked in the presence of the Word of God.

The Lord speaks to the heart that humbles itself before Him. At the altar of prayer, as the throne of grace is touched by faith, we receive from the hand of God that celestial torch which enlightens our darkness, and convinces us of our spiritual necessity. The Holy Spirit takes of the things of God, and reveals them to the one who is sincerely seeking for the heavenly treasure. If we yield to His guidance, He leads us into all light. As we behold the glory of Christ, we become changed into His image. We have that faith which works by love, and purifies the soul. Our hearts are renewed, and we are made willing to obey God in all things. —*Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 109.

I saw that the Israel of God must arise and renew their strength in God by renewing and keeping their covenant with Him. Covetousness, selfishness, love of money, and love of the world, are all through the ranks of Sabbathkeepers. These evils are destroying the spirit of sacrifice among God's people. Those that have this covet-ousness in their hearts are not aware of it. It has gained upon them imperceptibly, and unless it is rooted out, their destruction will be as sure as was Achan's. Many have taken the sacrifice from God's altar. They love the world, love its gain and increase, and, unless there is an entire change in them, they will perish with the world. God has lent them means; it is not their own, but God has made them His stewards. And because of this, they call it their own and hoard it up. But, oh, how quick, when the prospering hand of God is removed from them, it is all snatched away in a moment! There must be a sacrificing for God, a denying of self for the truth's sake. Oh, how weak and frail is man! How puny his arm! I saw that soon the loftiness of man is to be brought down, and the pride of man humbled. Kings and nobles, rich and poor, alike shall bow, and the withering plagues of God shall fall upon them. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 140.

Written on Stones

It is God's purpose to manifest through His people the principles of His kingdom. That in life and character they may reveal these principles, He desires to separate them from the customs, habits, and practices of the world. He seeks to bring them near to Himself, that He may make known to them His will.

This was His purpose in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. At the burning bush Moses received from God the message for the king of Egypt: "Let My people go, that they may serve Me." Exodus 7:16. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm God brought out the Hebrew host from the land of bondage. Wonderful was the deliverance He wrought for them, punishing their enemies, who refused to listen to His word, with total destruction.

God desired to take His people apart from the world and prepare them to receive His word. From Egypt He led them to Mount Sinai, where He revealed to them His glory. Here was nothing to attract their senses or divert their minds from God; and as the vast multitude looked at the lofty mountains towering above them, they could realize their own nothingness in the sight of God. Beside these rocks, immovable except by the power of the divine will, God communicated with men. And that His word might ever be clear and distinct in their minds, He proclaimed amid thunder and lightning and with terrible majesty the law which He had given in Eden and which was the transcript of His character. And the words were written on tables of stone by the finger of God. Thus the will of the infinite God was revealed to a people who were called to make known to every nation, kindred, and tongue the principles of His government in heaven and in earth.

To the same work He has called His people in this generation. To them He has revealed His will, and of them He requires obedience. In the last days of this earth's history the voice that spoke from Sinai is still saying to men: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." Exodus 20:3. Man has set his will against the will of God, but he cannot silence this word of command. The human mind can never fully comprehend its obligation to the higher power, but it cannot evade the obligation. Profound theories and speculations may abound, men may try to set science in opposition to revelation, and thus do away with the law of God; but stronger and still stronger will the Holy Spirit bring before them the command: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Matthew 4:10. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 9, 10.

Longing for His Presence

While on earth, Christ accomplished the work for which He left the throne of God in heaven. He worked for humanity, that through His work, humanity might be elevated in the scale of moral value with God. He assumed human nature, that He might elevate the human family, make them partakers of the divine nature, and place them on vantage ground with God. His every action had been in behalf of the fallen world—to seek the sheep that had strayed from the fold, and bring it back to God. . . .

The Lord saw us in a sad condition, and sent to our world the only Messenger that He could trust with His great treasure of pardon and grace. Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was the delegated messenger. He was ordained to do a work that even the angels of heaven could not accomplish. He alone could be trusted to do the work required for the redemption of a world all seared and marred with the curse. And in this gift the Father gave all heaven to the world.

What a change was this for the Son of God, Him who was the adored of angels, the Light of heaven! He might have gone to the pleasant homes of the unfallen worlds, to the pure atmosphere where disloyalty and rebellion had never intruded; and there He would have been received with acclamations of praise and love. But it was a fallen world that needed the Redeemer. “I came not to call the righteous,” said He, “but sinners to repentance.” He came to represent the Father in bringing the message of hope and salvation to our world. He lived not for Himself; He did not consult His own ease and pleasure; He did not yield to temptation; and He condescended to die in order that sinful men might be redeemed, and live eternally in the mansions He was to prepare for them. His mission was to teach souls who were dying in their sins.

This work Christ has laid upon every one whom He has purchased. The Lord will give ample light to all who will be true and loyal to Him. . . . His mercy and the gracious influences of His Spirit remain the same for all who will receive them. His offer of salvation does not change. It is man who changes His relationship to God. Many place themselves where they cannot recognize His grace and His salvation. . . .

God has left nothing undone that He could do for us. He gave a perfect example of His character in the character of His Son; and it is the work of Christ’s followers, as they behold the incomparable excellency of His life and character, to grow in His likeness. As they look unto Jesus and respond to His love, they will reflect the image of Christ. —*Lift Him Up*, p. 208.

Friday, November 14

For Further Reading

To Be Like Jesus, "All Nature Entrusted to Adam and Eve," August 2, p. 228.

To Be Like Jesus, "An Exhaustless Source of Instruction and Delight," August 28, p. 254.