



THE CELL GROUP

52

LESSONS FOR CELL GROUPS

BOOK 1



STRATEGY OF JESUS SIMPLIFIED



**APOSTOLIC ASSEMBLY
OF THE FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON 1: PERFECT LIGHT	6
LESSON 2: WHAT IS ESSENTIAL	9
LESSON 3: LOVE LETTER	12
LESSON 4: EXTRAORDINARY	15
LESSON 5: REJECTION	18
LESSON 6: START OVER.....	21
LESSON 7: SEEDS.....	25
LESSON 8: THY WILL BE DONE	29
LESSON 9: AS IN HEAVEN	33
LESSON 10: ... ALSO ON EARTH	37
LESSON 11: TRUE MATURITY	41
LESSON 12: WHY SHOULD I MATURE.....	45
LESSON 12: GOOD TREE OR BAD TREE.....	49
LESSON 14: TO REMAIN	53
LESSON 15: INEVITABLE	57
LESSON 16: NEW IMPULSE.....	60
LESSON 17: TRUE COMMUNION.....	63
LESSON 18: MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST: PART 1	67
LESSON 19: MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST: PART 2	71
LESSON 20: WINNING FRIENDS FOR CHRIST: PART 1	75
LESSON 21: WINNING FRIENDS TO CHRIST: PART 2	79
LESSON 22: BREAKING THE DEVIL'S CHAINS: PART 1.....	83
LESSON 23: BREAKING THE DEVIL'S CHAINS: PART 2.....	87
LESSON 24: STILL WATERS: PART 1.....	91
LESSON 25: STILL WATERS: PART 2.....	96
LESSON 26: RESTORED ALTAR, LIVING SACRIFICE.....	100

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON 27: OUR FAITH: PART 1.....	104
LESSON 28: OUR FAITH: PART 2.....	108
LESSON 29: WHERE WILL I GO AFTER THIS LIFE	112
LESSON 30: WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED: PART 1.....	116
LESSON 31: WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED: PART 2.....	120
LESSON 32: OVERCOMING TEMPTATION.....	124
LESSON 33: THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER.....	128
LESSON 34: A POWERFUL WEAPON	132
LESSON 35: IT WAS NOT ENOUGH	136
LESSON 36: VALUE OR PRICE.....	140
LESSON 37: TRUE ANOINTING OF CHANGE: PART 1	144
LESSON 38: TRUE ANOINTING OF CHANGE: PART 2	148
LESSON 39: TRUE ANOINTING OF CHANGE: PART 3	152
LESSON 40: CONTINUE BREATHING: PART 1	155
LESSON 41: CONTINUE BREATHING: PART 2	159
LESSON 42: HOW CAN YOU SLEEP: PART 1	163
LESSON 43: HOW CAN YOU SLEEP: PART 2	167
LESSON 44: HOW CAN YOU SLEEP: PART 3	171
LESSON 45: LET US HARVEST THE SOULS: PART 1	175
LESSON 46: LET US HARVEST THE SOULS: PART 2.....	179
LESSON 47: LET’S HARVEST THE SOULS: PART 3	183
LESSON 48: BE LIKE CHRIST: PART 1.....	187
LESSON 49: BE LIKE CHRIST: PART 2.....	191
LESSON 50: LESSONS FROM THE DESERT: PART 1	195
LESSON 51: LESSONS FROM THE DESERT: PART 2	199
LESSON 52: LESSONS FROM THE DESERT: PART 3	203

LESSON 1

PERFECT LIGHT

Why do you think of many people fear the dark?

John 1:9-12, KJV: "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name..."

INTRODUCTION

Many people are unable to sleep with the light off for fear of what might happen to them in the dark; they refuse to turn off the light, because the light offers them some security. Has the same thing happened to you? At some point, sure it has. Let's see why.

DARKNESS

In life, we all somehow want to leave the light on. There is something inside the human heart that rejects darkness. We reject darkness perhaps because it is like doubt that surround us. Darkness, one way or another, does not let us see, it prevents us from going beyond, it blocks us.

There are so many doubts in our mind! Where do we come from? What is our life's purpose? Why are we here? Where are we going? And we cannot simply ignore these questions that arise in the different chapters of our lives. It's that everyone; whatever the culture, language, time or place we are in; we all have that feeling that "there is something else". There's a why, a sense, a destiny; and that we need to find answers to all of this.

BEYOND

If darkness is doubt, light is believing. When we believe, we enter a much broader and deeper dimension of life, and of our reality. When we believe in something with certainty, it is like having something burning in our veins, running through the deepest part of our being. Why would this happen?

Answer: we were designed to believe, to trust. But trust what? Let's start with the fact that we all believe in something. When we go to a place and they invite us to take a seat, we do it trusting that the chair will hold us. When we start the car engine, we do it believing that it will take us to the desired destination. When we dial a phone number, we do so hoping to communicate with that person.

We believe in chairs, in cars, in telephones; we believe in so many things that are limited, small and insignificant things; but often we refuse to see beyond, to think about what is behind the visible, and to believe in it. Is God beyond all this that we see? Absolutely, and so, believing in God is the most important thing that can happen in your life. We were designed by Him to believe in Him.

PERFECT LIGHT

It is true that no one can really explain God with words, but that does not prevent Him from continuing to be the greatest thing that exists. God is much bigger than the furniture we have, the devices we handle; bigger than our friends, than all our relationships, thoughts and problems.

We all need to believe in something bigger than ourselves; But sometimes believing is not easy. Believing in a friend, just to be betrayed, is not easy. Believing in a relationship, just to be disappointed, really hurts. Is there anyone who never lies, never disappoints others? Who can be perfect in everything he does? No one, without a doubt.

But wait a moment! Yes, there is one that is Perfect and Holy, Good and Just; and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. The invisible God became visible through Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15 tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and the firstborn of all creation. Christ was born in a world surrounded by darkness; a world blocked by darkness; a world unable to see, and He was a perfect light for those people. It was two thousand years ago, and it still is today. Please, believe it!

CONCLUSION

Perhaps, you may live full of doubts; you feel surrounded by darkness, the uncertainties of life. But there is a light that offers you security, and His name Jesus. In the night of insecurity, fears and anxiety, He is within your reach. You can approach Him and see for yourself that, for those who trust in Him, everything is possible, as He Himself has said.

Jesus is the reason why everything else exists; and if all your faith and trust is placed in Him, who moves everything, who owns everything, who has created everything, sustains everything and provides you with everything you have right now, your life can become something extraordinary.

Turn on the true light in your life. Choose to trust Jesus, to all who receive him, to those who believe in Him, Jesus grants the immense honor of being His children (John 1:12). Amen.

Notes

LESSON 2

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL

Have you ever looked for something for a long time, and ended up discovering that the entire time you had it in front of you? Why do you think that happens to us?

Ecclesiastes 1:14, KJV: *"I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."*

INTRODUCTION

Something very striking that we humans have is the capacity we call concentration. It's something very necessary and helpful, but sometimes makes us focus so much on one thing, that we forget everything else.

For example: There are those who have studied so much for an exam, that they have forgotten the date and the presentation is due the next day. How about a player who goes after the ball and has forgotten which side he is playing on and scores a goal in his own goal. Or when we were little (who hasn't this happened to?), we concentrated so much on making the knot on our shoelace, only to find that when we stood up, we realized that we put our shoe on the wrong foot. Start over!

STOP A LITTLE

A few months ago, my wife and I were at an airport, when I received a call from a friend. The conversation was so pleasant, and it caught me in such a way, that for several minutes I forgot that I had to board a plane. Good thing my wife was there to remind me! If I had been alone, I would have surely missed that flight.

We are curious beings; we get lost in the details, we entertain ourselves, we get distracted to the extent that on the road we have decided to take, we forget where we are going! We are so busy in many obligations we have; work, studies, mortgage payment, bills, credit cards, electronic messages ... we never stop to think about why we do all of that.

USELESS SEARCH

Many times, we walk with so many things in our head that we end up disoriented, and lose sight of what is really important. The big question is, how do you avoid it?

Why do we stop being clear about the essentials? Why do we lose sight of the true objective? We need to stop at some point and think about this. The writer of the book Ecclesiastes - King Solomon – held himself back on this matter and wrote that everything that happens in this world is a vain illusion, a total absurdity.

Is that for real? It looks like it is. Solomon describes in the best way what happens to all of us, saying that as we seek the meaning of life *“all is vanity and vexation of spirit”*. At a certain moment in his life, already tired of so much fruitless search, he writes the following: *“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.”* Ecclesiastes 2:11, KJV.

WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT

If we read Ecclesiastes completely, we will find that Solomon lived wondering about the meaning of life; the reason for his existence. He spent a lot of time and money building mansions, conquering territories, obtaining slaves, spending time with good and bad company; but at the end of it all, he realized that he still didn't know what was really important, what was essential.

It is not until the end of his years, from his large experience, that Solomon discovers that the most important thing in our ephemeral existence is to please God: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”* Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, KJV.

What this wise king says is something very serious, and absolutely true. We should never forget that we will all give an account to God about what we have done during our lives. We should never lose sight of the undeniable fact that we exist to seek God, to know Him, obey Him and honor Him; giving glory to Him in everything we do (Isaiah 43:7, 1 Corinthians 10:31).

But how can we be clear about the way we should go, without getting lost in the many existing detours, without falling into a deadly hole? Jesus responds to this by saying that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). In other words, He is the role model, the only safe guide in the midst of the many distractions and misses of life.

CONCLUSION

For many - and perhaps for you - living and trusting in a God that cannot be seen or touched, seems complicated; but you must understand that, in this life, the most essential things are invisible to the eyes. For example, you have the air you breathe: you don't see it, but how much you need it!

I hope that you will soon find the true meaning to life. You can stop trying to “catch the wind” and walk after Jesus, because after all that is the essential thing of life.

What do you think? Will you finally look for the essence of life, which is Christ? When will you start?

LESSON 3

LOVE LETTER

Who does a letter belong to: the one who wrote it or the one who received it?

Jeremiah 31:3, KJV: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

INTRODUCTION

There was a time when people waited for their letters for days, weeks and months. There were those who waited years. The recipient would receive the letter and read it, often more than once, and sometimes many times; especially, if it was a love letter. Many years ago, letters traveled great distances to reach their destination. Today, with the advancement of technology, time and distance has disappeared for letters, and communication is practically instantaneous.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF LETTER

Today, I want to tell you about a very special letter; one that was sent a long time ago and cannot be compared with any other. This letter took 1,500 years to write and its author had to use different pens to do so. It is a monumental, phenomenal letter and - perhaps you will be surprised to know it - it is also a love letter. You will wonder who it's aimed towards ... answering this question is very important!

Imagine that you enter your email account and you find an email that says "I love you very much", and you start thinking: What do I do? Do I open it? Do I not open it? And if it is "spam" or junk? Maybe I better send it to the trash! But what if it is a true e-mail? What if someone is really telling you that they love you?

You open the mail, and the moment you open it, it has become yours; It no longer only belongs to the person who sent it to you; Now it is yours too, and you can do whatever you want with it. You can delete it; You can save it, or you can print it and reread it many times ... What you do with that email now is your decision and responsibility, because it is yours.

More than 3,000 years ago, God decided to write us a letter, a love letter; a letter that wasn't necessary, but that became necessary because at a certain moment in this whole story, man separated himself from God. People who love each other and for some reason distance themselves, have the need to reduce the space the separates them. It is what God tries to do with us.

Like when we walk away from home and to communicate with our loved ones, we use phone calls, emails, text messages or even the classic paper letters. God had to use the method of writing; He had to use the Bible to send us his love letter.

A LOVE LETTER

The Bible is the proof or evidence of God's love for humanity; of his interest in approaching you and me. The Bible is the letter of someone who does not want to live far from you. Why? Because he loves you with all His heart, with all his strength.

Today, it seems impossible that there is still such a love, but this love is true. God's love is genuine and sincere, like no other. The Bible says that you and I are *"the apple in the eyes of God"* (Psalm 17:8); In other words, the most precious treasure for Him.

Although the Bible is the most edited and published book in history, it is a book that we don't normally read. We have it in our homes, but we know it very little about it. We treat

it as “spam”! However, God continues to call us, continues to send us phrases of love like the one he sent to Jeremiah: *“With eternal love I have loved you, so I have attracted you with mercy.”* Or the one who sent to Israel, in Hosea 11:4: *“I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.”*

In the previous two lessons, we talked about true light and what is essential. The lines written in this Love Letter indicate the path to that True Light, to the Essential; they teach us the way back to God, true love.

CONCLUSION

If you accept this Letter, it will be yours too. I invite you to open it and read it carefully, because it is a love letter for you. It is a Letter like never before. I invite you to believe in this Letter because to believe in it is to believe in its Author. To believe in God is to believe in someone who loves you; to believe in Him is to read His Word again and again as a letter signed by Him. It’s a Letter that has crossed oceans of time to reach you, with a message of sincere love.

Many people risked their lives and too many lost it so that you could receive this letter. It was not always available, but today it is. Like me and so many other, I hope you discover that this letter can really transform your life. I hope you can understand that the Bible is a love letter for you; a letter full of passion for you and a love letter that wants to be yours.

Do you believe in the love of God? Do you believe that His Word is authentic, true? What is your opinion about all of this?

LESSON 4

EXTRAORDINARY

Has it ever happened to you that a person was not who they said they were? How did you feel after you found out?

John 7:46b, KJV: *“Never man spake like this man!”*

INTRODUCTION

There are many people capable of recognizing Jesus as a great teacher, an excellent thinker, an extraordinary philosopher. Of course, Jesus is an unrepeatable person in all of history. Even Jews who do not see the expected messiah in Him recognize that Jesus was a great teacher. His enemies were unable to get away from him; they hated him as much as they admired him; they secretly admired him, as much as they publicly despised him. He was admired from all areas; social, cultural, religious, and even political. In Jesus, we can find someone very unique; something, that even Nietzsche, a recognized - atheist thinker – who once said: “There really was only one Christian, and he was the one who died on the Cross.”

Jesus is someone who leaves traces, even among his enemies. Someone like that, as extraordinary as Him, would he not be able to give you something? Of course!

HE IS REAL

Augusto Cury, an eminent Brazilian psychiatrist, said: “I was an atheist, but after studying the personality of Jesus Christ, I became a Christian. I became convinced, not through paleography - the study of ancient documents - or archeology; but based on the psychology that no author could build such a character.” Jesus does not fit in the human imagination!

Jesus was real; He walked, lived and breathed on this Earth. He is someone more than impressive. He is not who you have been told He is. Jesus came to show love in its purest form. Could that love not give us something? Could that love help improve our marriage? Could it help us relate better with other people? Even though we might think we are perfect as we are now, could Jesus show us what we need to improve on? Of course!

And many of us are trying. Many of us are living it, and it is much better than we can tell you. You just have to try it or will you pass Him by just because He doesn't look like what you expected? You may not believe that He is God; maybe you think he's just a man; which is also true, he was a real man. However, He was a man who changed the way people think forever, who altered the course of history and chronology (the years are counted before and after Him).

WHAT DOES HE HAVE?

Yet, we Christians do not refer to Jesus as a historical character or as someone dead because we communicate with Him and He speaks to us. How can this be explained? It seems crazy. It is perhaps the most difficult thing to accept from Him: that Jesus is alive, that He has risen.

I invite you to take a Bible, open it and read the writings of Jesus. If you want, "wrestle" with the writings. Ask all the questions you need to ask. It may not be easy at the beginning, but I assure you that in the end, you will no longer be the same person. Jesus is going to change your life.

What does Jesus have that, even today, He is capable of upsetting people? And if "upset" seems like a strong word, we can change it for others such as "transform", "remake" or "rebuild." They are all words that imply action, that speak to us of change and of things that happen within us. They

denote closeness. Those changes occur from the inside out as Jesus taught because good and bad things come from within each person's heart (Luke 6:45).

Great news is that Jesus will do nothing with you if you do not consent. He has the power to do it. He is the only one who has that power, but he will only use it in you if you let him. As you approach Jesus, you will discover that many of the values that your parents, societies or school have taught you, really come from the philosophy of life that Jesus lived, taught and preached. Discovering this will make you see differently, and will surely surprise you because the legacy of Jesus is still very present in society.

The thought of Jesus is something extraordinary, something bright and incomparable from every point of view. If we only put a small part of the Gospel of Christ into practice, everything would be very different!

CONCLUSION

When no other reason was valid, Jesus has given me and many other people a reason to live. He is really the reason why we live. I invite you to discover Him, to know Him. It's an invitation, but it's also an imperative that dictates your own need, your own concern, your own curiosity.

Jesus loves you, I'm sure; He lets me know, He allow me to feel it, He shows it to me all the time. Jesus is thinking of you right now; don't doubt it.

Oh, and just in case ... we're not crazy.

Are there any questions you would like to ask Jesus right now; something you would like to know about Him?

LESSON 5

REJECTION

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word "rejection"?

Luke 2:34-35, KJV: *"And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes I try to imagine the history of this world from God's point of view, and it seems to me that it is a sad story. From the beginning, God was seeking man, trying to convince him of His love; but man always doubts His intentions; misunderstands them, forgets them, and rejects them.

REJECTION

Rejection is difficult, right? When you've tried to do everything for someone; when you've tried to explain yourself, but they misunderstand you and don't even let you defend yourself. Rejection is like an insurmountable barrier. As much as you insist, as much as you try. You try to explain your motives, your reasons, your intentions, and it's no use.

In the gospels, an occasion is mentioned where Jesus is contemplating the city of Jerusalem, and at that moment all the attempts he has made to convince His people of His love come to mind. Centuries and centuries trying to reach the heart of man to save him and nothing. Jesus says: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"* Matthew 23:37.

Another writer adds that while Jesus said goodbye to Jerusalem, his tears were gone; He could not bear the pain: *"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."* Luke 19:41-42, KJV.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it, but here, God is crying for man. Can you imagine? God is crying for His failed attempt, the rejection of his people; for all the suffering; trying to save man by every means; to see that so many people just didn't want it.

A CURIOUS GIFT

There is a character who represents this sad story for Jesus: Judas. The Lord shared with him three and a half years, traveling together, laughing, crying, preaching together. He tried to reach the heart of this man, but after so much effort, Judas betrayed him, selling him for thirty silver coins. God tried to save his friend by every means, but he couldn't ... it was terrible!

Freedom is a curious gift. God loves you so much that he respects your decision, whatever it takes; even if that means losing you forever. Sometimes I think about it: it would be better for us not to be free, but then you would no longer be you and God would no longer be love.

WHAT HE WANTS MOST

Christians believe in a happy ending to this story. The Bible is full of promises that speak of God returning to this earth. It is described with trumpets, angels, a burst of joy from all who await His coming; and so it will be for many ... but for God? I suppose that on the one hand He will be very happy, but on the other, I am convinced that he will have a deep pain in his heart, for all those who have rejected Him.

I can imagine God removing Himself for a moment from the party, and saying goodbye to the planet crying for the last time, perhaps remembering His own words: "How many times I tried to save you, and you didn't want to." You know, rejection is very hard for God because the Bible tells us that what God wants most in this world is to spend eternity with you.

The eternal, infinite and almighty Creator has created you free, but with the illusion that you receive Him in your heart; with the illusion that you let Him save you; let Him take you out of this unfair and sick world once and for all. But He cannot choose for you; He will never betray your freedom.

CONCLUSION

I wonder how this story is going to end; not the history of this world, but yours. If you really want it, your life can have a happy ending. It's up to you. But before you answer, let's read John 12:44-48, KJV: *"Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."*

I just hope you don't reject Jesus, and I hope you receive him as the Savior that we all need. I hope that the plans you have for your life are big enough to understand God, and wide enough to cover eternity.

Will you receive it, or will you refuse it? What is your decision today?

LESSON 6

START OVER

Has it ever happened to you that the computer you were working on turned off unexpectedly, and the task you were doing you had to start all over?

2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV: *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*

INTRODUCTION

A new life began the day we came to Him!” What a powerful phrase. We have sung it so many times; we have repeated it again and again, in teachings and preaching, with fervor and enthusiasm, and yet we have all doubted its authenticity. Is what the apostle Paul says true? Are we really new creatures? It should be because the Bible does not lie.

HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO CHANGE

Paul’s words are really shocking! He writes them to the believers of Corinth in the first century of our era in order to establish that, if a believer has joined Christ, if he is really converted to Him, he has already been transformed into a new creature. He has become a totally different person.

And now, more than a promise, Paul’s words are an affirmation; they express a certainty that our old customs, habits, tendencies, and so on. They have disappeared completely since the day we gave ourselves to Jesus. And yet, the opposite seems to be true. Under some circumstantial pressure, or worse, without apparent pressure, we suddenly return to the person we were before, with the same weaknesses, mistakes and failures. Sometimes it gives us the impression that we are worse than before. Ouch! Why is it so hard for us to change?

It is very likely that when you came to Christ you would think that all this would be different; that it would be relatively easy for you to modify what you didn't like about yourself, or what you knew didn't please God. But the Bible continues to insist.

START OVER

The Apostle Paul, in another one of his letters, invites us to a complete change. He asks us to stop conforming (adapting) to this world (to the ideas of people who don't know God), and to be transformed *"by the renewing of your mind."* Romans 12.2a. Here we can appreciate that being Christians is living differently from what culture proposes, but it is much more than that: our person needs to have a transformation, a total, radical change. Being a Christian is not only about making superficial, half changes; or hiding behind a group of people twice or three times a week. Don't do it. To be a Christian is to experience a complete renewal of being.

Look carefully at the following dialogue between Jesus and a religious teacher from Israel: *"The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?"* John 3:2-4, KJV. The Lord asks us to start again in order to be able to save us, but how? How can we "reset" our way of thinking and living? (to "reset" is to "restart"). Nicodemus was not able to understand it; but before returning to the dialogue between him and Jesus, let's remember another famous phrase that Jesus said to his disciples: *"for without me ye can do nothing."* John 15.5, KJV.

So, only by being united to Jesus can we experience the renewal of our mind, the transformation of our life. Only if we receive His Spirit and remain completely in Him, does the experience of being “new creatures” become a reality. But if we turn away from Jesus, our Christian life becomes a mere illusion, or what Paul calls “the appearance of mercy.”

Let’s see what Jesus responded to Nicodemus: “— *I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God if he is not born of water and the Spirit. The human being can only reproduce human life, but the spiritual life is born of the Holy Spirit. So don’t be surprised when I say: ‘Ye must be born again.’*” John 3:5-7, KJV.

ONLY HE CAN DO IT

When an item has become old, obsolete, or is damaged it needs to be renewed. But such an element cannot renew itself but must be placed in the hands of the expert. Who better than the manufacturer of something, to put your product back, to restore it to its original state?

Jesus is the one who made you and formed you; and that is why there is no one better than Him to transform your life. He is really the only one capable of making you a new creature from head to toe; but for that to happen, you have to put yourself in His hands and trust 100% in Him. This is what Jesus asks of you: “*Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.*” Isaiah 43:18-19, KJV.

CONCLUSION

Jesus assures you a future, a hope, a better life here and another unimaginably better life in eternity. You just have to let Him sanctify you, cleanse you and completely renew you: “*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I*

LESSON 7

SEEDS

Have you ever planted a seed? Share your experience.

Isaiah 61:3b: *"...that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."*

INTRODUCTION

There are those who say that if God exists, he is deaf, blind and lame. It seems that He had forgotten this planet! It is not difficult to realize that the world is not right: disasters, wars, inequalities; and there is not only physical suffering. There is also the hidden suffering often not confessed of loneliness, fear, depression and anguish. And all that is lived on this little planet Earth causing many people to doubt God.

With such a panorama, we have to ask about our own position. How are we living in so much pain? Are we aware of why we are here? What response are we giving to the desperate needs around us?

THE KINGDOM OF LOVE

We cannot continue changing the channel every time a piece of news reminds us of the sad situation in which others live. We cannot pass by the problem of others, as those religious of the parable of Jesus did. (Luke 10:30-32).

We are called to be people of convictions, not conformism. We are called to be agents of change because in the heart of the One who created this Earth there is a higher reality than the human being lives; a reality that transcends the problems, needs and suffering of the people of this world. That reality is called the "Kingdom of God."

Centuries ago, Jesus inaugurated this empire, built on love; not about power or material wealth. But even today, many Christians continue without embracing that basic and essential principle that would change the course of our history: *“Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

These words were not written by Christ for a religious sermon or political speech: those words He lived by. Jesus knew how to win people’s hearts, being interested in their problems, dealing with their needs, and incensed with injustice and abuse. How are you living right now? Do other people’s problems hurt you? Or do they not even affect you? Is your life a mirror in which you only see your own needs? Or is it a window that connects you with others? Do you live like Christ, to serve others, or do you live for yourself? What are you doing right now to help others so that the lives of others are better?

THE SMALL SEED

When the Lord taught, he did it through parables; simple stories for simple people, but that brought new perspectives on reality. Jesus always takes us one step further. On one occasion, He said: *“The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”* Matthew 13:31-32 KJV.

Notes

Then, Jesus would call people to repent, because the kingdom of God had come to them; I was among them. What did Jesus mean? Certainly, not a religion or ideology, but a person, and that person was Himself! The Kingdom of God is Jesus, and His kingdom becomes among us when we have Him in our hearts; when we live under the principles that He established, and we become people willing to lead others to that life that He prepared for his children (John 10:10).

Certainly, the disciples knew that abundant life and experienced the power of God, which is capable of transforming any reality, no matter how difficult it is.

PROTECTIVE SHADOW

Acts of the Apostles tells us that the first believers were like one heart: *"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."* Acts 4:32. So in the early church, there was no need because the believers were like trees that protected and sheltered the people who came to them with their problems and difficulties. People were attracted by the love that the disciples gave them; not their natural love, but the Love that comes from God.

Today Jesus calls us, not to boast an authority superior to that of the rest of the people, but to be His collaborators. He calls us to feel the joy of doing good for other people, to be true trees of justice that provide freshness and protection to those who need it in the midst of their desolation.

CONCLUSION

God did not forget mankind. God is not deaf or blind to man's suffering. He's preparing to return very soon to restore this broken world. Meanwhile, you are that seed of faith and hope that He wants to plant. His wish is that you represent

LESSON 8

THY WILL BE DONE

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word “will”?

Matthew 6:10: *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”*

INTRODUCTION

The central purpose of Jesus’ first coming to Earth was that through Him, men could know God; and that way we would receive his blessings and gifts promised to mankind since ancient times. One of the greatest gifts we can have in this life is the ability to discover how God wants us to live; to know His will, or when Jesus said he would *“guide you into all truth.”* John 16:13.

STARTING POINT

Jesus is the truth! To know His will is to know Him, something very great without a doubt, but also something accessible to all. All it takes to achieve it is personal disposition. The happiest moment for the Lord is when He finds someone interested in Him, someone willing to know and understand him; and more than anything, someone willing to obey His will. This is the essence of this lesson and the following: the measure of our willingness to do the will of God.

BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND

To begin to understand God’s will, we must know that He thinks differently than we do. God says in His Word: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher*

than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8-9, KJV. God’s ways are very different from ours!

Spiritual people - what the Bible calls “carnal” - try to understand God with their limited mind; but that is something totally impossible, because the mind of our God is infinite. God is the Eternal Spirit and we cannot measure it or judge it from our human perspective, according to our capacity or character. Faced with this truth, the Apostle Paul exclaims in Romans 11:33: *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!”*

For “natural” people, the knowledge of God is something unfathomable, incomprehensible. What hope do we have then? Answer: The new birth! A topic that we talked about in the “Start Over” lesson, and which we will talk about again in our next lesson. For now, and to begin to understand God’s will, we will look at His nature and purpose, as we can find in his Holy Book - the Bible.

DIVINE NATURE

Certainly in a few lessons, it is impossible to get a complete impression of the character and personality of God. We wouldn’t get it in a million lessons! However, some biblical verses draw His basic nature.

Of course, the clearest knowledge we will have of God in most areas will be that reflected in the face of Jesus Christ, *“who is the image of God, should shine unto them...For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* 2 Corinthians 4:4,6.

If you follow Jesus closely through the gospels, you will see Him lean toward the children, speak softly to the poor, respond judiciously to the critics, cry with his friends in tragedies, try to reach an indifferent city with a tender heart. Oh, to become like Jesus! That is the will of God regarding your life in Jesus Christ.

Read the book of Matthew, Luke or John; Your memories of Jesus will be renewed. Let your tears roll down your cheeks while your heart is shed towards those He touched. Allow the Spirit of his compassion for the aching to wrap you again and again. Pay close attention to the life of our Lord Jesus.

Christ and you will find that ...

1. JESUS IS RATIONAL. He does not lose his head in a hurried or difficult situation. He never makes incorrect or light judgments. His nerves stand firm under pressure. Jesus never manifests a spirit of vengeance. This is the will of God.

2. JESUS IS WELL ADAPTED. He does not feel insecure or inferior, or fight for identity or fame. He does not look for situations of personal exaltation; On no occasion does he use a scapegoat. He has no indication of wanting to blame, flashes of self-justification or false rationalizations. This is the will of God.

3. JESUS IS CONSTANT. We can always depend on Him, because He is always the same. His modes or disposition has always been kept under control. Happy? Yes! Sad? Sometimes. Depressed? Never. Confused? Never! Committed and dedicated? Absolutely!

4. JESUS KNOWS EVERYTHING. There are no blind spots in your vision. When He looks at or examines our life and its different parts, its perception does not lose

any aspect; and yet, the Master's gaze is always full of compassion and understanding. Jesus is always loving, kind; never sententious. This is the will of God.

5. JESUS IS POWERFUL. He is always able to do something about any situation that comes to His attention. There is nothing that He cannot fix. He pronounces the Word to unleash the miracle, supply the need and solve the problem; no matter how impossible it seems. This is the will of God.

6. JESUS IS REALISTIC. He does not prescribe or advise a method of action that is impossible. Some things seem impossible to us, but with the Lord nothing is impossible. He always gives us the ability to do what He requires. This is His will.

7. JESUS IS WITHIN REACH. He is not someone of bronze with a heart of stone who lives on another planet, but one who can sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). He is totally alive and in touch with the spirit of man. He always has time for you.

CONCLUSION

You are already from God, and He is yours! And on this wonderful fact lies the pleasant concept that you can always be guided by Him. If you follow Jesus, you will never go astray.

Notes

LESSON 9

AS IN HEAVEN

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word “project”?

Matthew 6:10: *“...Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”*

INTRODUCTION

By giving ourselves wholeheartedly to Christ, we begin to see every area of our life with different, new, and sometimes surprising perspectives. By receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord, we experience a growing desire to order our lives according to His will; a longing to discover the plans that He has for us, and a rejection of our own selfish plans and desires.

THE PLAN OF GOD

God has an action plan. He wants to prepare His people. He wants to bless the people of the world and pour over each of them in a supernatural and miraculous way. God does not want people to be lost in hell, but that every human being be saved and go to Heaven (2 Peter 3:9). And who does God seek to carry out this plan? Men, women, youth and children who dare to believe in Him and rejoice in doing His will.

Yes, Jesus came to include us in His project. From the beginning, God conceived this great plan: to come to *“seek and save that which was lost.”* Luke 19:10. While in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus said: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,*

to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” Luke 4:18-19.

So, the plan of Christ is composed of three elements:

1. PREACH. From the moment Jesus left the temptation of the desert, he began to preach his message of the kingdom. What a fresh and relevant voice for a forgetful and dusty generation! Soon the Apostles and the early Church would take action as well. See Romans 10:13-15.

2. SET FREE. What a great ministry Christ had! A careful look at Matthew chapters 9 and 10 shows in a perfectly clear way that He came to free people from sin; and John 20:21-22 tells us that today Jesus employs his Church for it: “as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. He then blew on them and said: **“Receive ye the Holy Spirit.”** Those who forgive their sins will be forgiven. Those who are not forgiven will not be forgiven.

3. HEAL. God has provided physical healing for us. How much mercy and love He has for the sick! By His wounds we have been healed (1 Peter 2:24). Our health can be completely restored by faith in Him. Still, let us always remember that the true purpose of His coming is to save us from sin (Matthew 1:21), which is the cause of many diseases.

Preach, set free, heal! Many times, we lose sight of these spiritual directives, perhaps because we do not associate them with the daily practices of our Christian life or because we spend days, months and years too busy at work, home, “ministry”, etc. Let’s not forget God’s plan! We make thousands of decisions daily; let’s make sure to take them with God’s project in perspective, and with a singularity of purpose - His purpose - which is to save the lost.

Now let's identify some ways of thinking that don't align and don't correspond to God's will.

WHAT IS NOT THE WILL OF GOD

1. "There are three levels of the will of God". The will of God does not have three levels. Romans 12.1-2 teaches that God's will in our life is good, pleasant and perfect. Here, some people try to find three degrees or levels. They are the same who think things like: "I am not the Apostle Paul! Who can do the perfect will of God? I can be saved at the level of 'good' I am now, right? Surely, if someone reaches the level of the perfect will, it is a minister."

But what does this scripture really mean? Quite so! The will of God in our life is good, pleasant and perfect at the same time! Notice that when God created the world He did not do it first good, then pleasant and finally perfect; He did it all this way at once, because all the things he does are good, pleasant and perfect. If you dedicate your life to Him, you will undoubtedly discover the perfect plan that God has for you.

2. "Lord, where do you want to send me?" God's plan is not exclusively geographical. When you talk about the subject of His will, you usually think of moving to a distant country, quite different from ours. Many are excited about the idea of going to a distant place thousands of miles from home; but they could get there and find out that God ... never agreed with them! It is true that throughout the world there are fields waiting for workers, but just as true as that it, we can preach Christ where we are right now, and work for Him in our local church.

3. "How difficult it is to find His will!" God's will is not difficult to find; His will is within reach of every believer filled with the Holy Spirit. Never think that God is hiding from us. Although He may not always answer as soon as you would

LESSON 10

... ALSO ON EARTH

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the expression “aimlessly”?

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 6:10: *“...Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”*

People today walking blindly, looking for meaning of life. But the apostolic people, the people of God, are seized by the only solid Rock that exists! The key to this, the key to knowing God’s perfect will is in personal disposition, as we stated before. Now let’s see what the two dimensions of God’s will are.

THE GENERAL DIMENSION OF HIS WILL

Let’s study three scriptures that tell us about this topic:

1. Colossians 1:26-28, KJV: *“...Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”*

Here we are shown the fundamental purpose of God for us, which is to save us. God really longs to take us with Him, but for that to be possible, we must live in His will; be formed to perfection, and thus be able to be presented before Him irreprehensible.

2. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8,11,12, KJV: *“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit. And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.”*

In these scriptures, it is very clear that what God wants from us is holiness. The sanctification of the believer is the general dimension of God’s will for his Church!

3. Romans 12:1-2, KJV: *“...I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”*

Here, God speaks to us of a decision that everyone must make. We make ourselves available to Him by our own choice, or we reject Him by our own choice; no one else can decide for us. God is a gentleman; He does not impose himself on anyone; He is always by our side, but only

occupies the throne of our life at our invitation. So, you and I must allow the flow of His desires to flow freely through our lives. We must give our whole life to Him as a living and holy sacrifice! That is the will of God.

THE SPECIFIC DIMENSION OF HIS WILL

Discovering the specific dimension of God's will is the believer's own privilege. We have looked in a previous lesson at the most important characteristics of the divine nature. Now, we'll say that it's essential to personally appropriate each gift of God, each one of His attributes. This allows us to form an immovable base on which to affirm each time we are in need of His direction. The more we know God, the better we know His will. The will of God is a sense of orientation grafted in each person; not something we struggle to obtain, but a presence with which we live.

An excellent guide to determine if the direction of an issue is of God's will is the following test of four questions:

- (1) Does it have Biblical sense?
- (2) Does it have spiritual sense?
- (3) Does it have circumstantial sense?
- (4) Does it have common sense?

If these four areas line up affirmatively, we can be sure that it is God who guides us.

Our faith does not have to be shaken on critical situations, and there is no need to even make a wrong turn in this "cruise" of life. We can trust that God knows that we need His help, and that He is willing to give it to us if we accept his conditions. God will always clarify his intentions and desires because He loves us. God will listen to every question or request we ask him as a father!

LESSON 11

TRUE MATURITY

What do you think? Maturity and age, are they the same thing?

Ephesians 4:13-15: "...Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."

INTRODUCTION

The biblical text we read tells us about spiritual maturity; a type of development that allows us to live a life according to the model that Jesus Christ left us. We will learn about this very important topic in this lesson and in the next two.

ASKING THE LORD

We are educated as children in order to perform in life, in order to be able to perform as human beings in the different facets of our existence so that we can observe in our culture and as a generality, that education makes the difference between a decent life and an indigent or poor life. Let us now examine the spiritual. By receiving Christ as our Savior, we are suddenly responsible for realizing ourselves in a novelty of life; we are made new creatures. Here, spiritual teaching is what makes the difference.

Many times, we conceptualize spiritual teaching as a Bible study dictated in a classroom, at a certain time, on a certain day, with a teacher speaking from the front. However, when it comes to spiritual maturity, it turns out that the relevant

teaching is also dictated outside the classroom, in every place and at all times, through the Holy Spirit. That is to say, it doesn't matter so much in what way - and it should be both - every believer needs to resemble Christ more and more, in every area of his life, throughout his life.

TRUE CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Many times, Christian maturity is misunderstood; for example, it is seen as a body of knowledge being transferred from the mind of the teacher to that of the student. Or it is associated with training people to follow certain rites, rules or habits; or to develop certain skills. There are also those who believe they have reached spiritual maturity only because they have prepared to argue with those from other religious creeds, or to survive the prophetic events that the Bible predicts. And there are many other concepts like these on the subject.

But what is Christian maturity really? Christian maturity is transformation and development; it is the acquisition of the experience of salvation in Jesus Christ so that the life of the believer is transformed and becomes developed, enriched and perfected through his personal relationship with God. This definition also includes those ideas of learning, acquiring knowledge, character qualities, customs acceptable to the Christian, doctrinal preparation and skills necessary to serve God; but fundamentally it indicates that it is the total transformation of the person that makes everything else possible.

MUCH MORE THAN KNOWLEDGE

Before ascending to Heaven, Christ said to his people: *"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on Earth. Go, then, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I have commanded them; and remember! I am with you every day, until the end of the world."* Matthew 28:18-20, KJV.

The commission or commission of Christ is direct and simple; He refers to making disciples and revolves around His teachings. The goal of the commission given by Jesus is that his disciples keep everything that He has commanded us, that is, that we put into practice everything learned from Him.

Maturing spiritually, therefore, is much more than attending one or two weekly meetings to listen to a Bible teacher. Jesus asks us much more than to learn His truths. He wants to see fruits in our lives. He certainly did more than impart knowledge to people: His teaching transformed the lives of those who listened with faith! This is the path to true Christian maturity, the path that each of us must travel.

FOUR STEPS TO TRUE MATURITY

According to Matthew 28:18-20, KJV, there are four stations on the road to Christian maturity:

1. CONTACT: *“Go.”* He who has to become a disciple of Jesus must first make contact with the message of salvation and know the biblical facts. How can someone be contacted with the Word of God if he is not first found by another person willing to go out and look for him?

2. SALVATION: *“Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them.”* The believer needs to receive Christ as his personal savior and become a committed member of His church. In our next lesson, we will talk about the difference between being a simple believer and being a real disciple of Jesus.

3. LEARNING: *“Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”* Being saved by Christ is only the first step towards abundant and fruitful life in Him. This third step consists in learning His commandments and being affirmed in faith and in the Christian life; in other words, acquire the biblical norms of doctrine and conduct.

LESSON 12

WHY SHOULD I MATURE

What do you think of this phrase? “Maturing means stop thinking about yourself, to begin to see the needs of others.”

Ephesians 4:13-15: *“...Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”*

INTRODUCTION

In the previous lesson, we said that having spiritual maturity is much more than accumulating biblical knowledge or years in the Church; we said that to mature is really to experience a total transformation that allows us to become like Jesus. Today, we’ll talk about the need, purpose and results of spiritual maturity.

THE NEED TO MATURE

The Word of God and our own experience teach us that Jesus has not left us orphans in life. He has come to us through his Spirit. He dwells in us and guides us in every step of our pilgrimage. There really is nothing more precious than the joy of having fellowship with Jesus every day as we prepare for the eternal life that He gave us!

To live in Christ is to open ourselves to a new world; it is to travel a path full of vital experiences for our development. Jesus said: *“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”* John 10:10. Jesus offers us an abundant life. He promises to let us know

the truth and that this truth will set us free; free from the slavery of sin; free to live a victorious life. In this vibrant and meaningful life, our joys completely cover the temporary afflictions, persecutions and difficulties that occur along the way.

The Apostle Paul describes his own experience in the Christian life as follows: *“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”* 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, KJV.

And so, it is. In the Bible, there are no promises of a trouble-free life, but there are promises of permanent peace and joy that the sufferings in this world cannot take away from us. It depends on whether we have matured enough to prevent this from happening; it depends on what attitude we have as we face the difficulties that arise daily. The question is not whether difficulties will come; the question is: how will we face them?

THE PURPOSE OF MATURITY

The purpose of maturing spiritually is to learn to apply the principles of the Christian life in our daily life, which are clearly indicated in the Word of God. Learning to live the Christian life in an integral way will prevent us from having to always go to our spiritual leaders and / or more mature brothers in the Lord, for prayer, advice or help.

The Bible has much to teach us about our duties at home, work, church and other settings of our lives. These points are vital, because Christians are not “islands.” Our influence on people is absolutely real. Jesus said that we are

“the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” In other words, our Christian testimony is decisive for the salvation of other people. We need to know in depth the Word of God, because the more we treasure it, the more easily we can please God, and the better testimony we can give to others. Look what David said: *“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”* Psalm 119:11.

Having a life like that of Christ, a life like the Bible teaches, is the greatest testimony of the new birth that any believer can give. Everyone ask yourself now: How should I live? What does God ask me about my personal discipline as his son? How should I conduct myself among non-believers? How can I positively impact the lives of others? A brief but precise answer to the above is: maturing!

THE RESULTS OF MATURITY

Now, let's see seven things that the Lord expects us to do for His kingdom after we have matured in the Faith. The list is not complete, but it is a magnificent summary of the great commission, of the commission to make disciples that

Jesus left us:

1. Preach the Word of God; leading others to know it, receive it, study it, treasure it and obey it.
2. Proclaim the salvation that is in Jesus, convincing others to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior, and be baptized in His glorious Name.
3. Pray for believers to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and then continue walking in the Spirit.
4. Help them acquire Christian habits and live under the will of God, in complete dependence on Him.

5. Guide them until they reach spiritual maturity and the development of their spiritual gifts and talents.

6. Train them to fulfill their ministry, inside and outside the Church; to do their part in the crucial mission of rescuing the lost, for whom Christ offered his life.

7. Motivate and encourage others to always be prepared for their departure from this Earth, for their entry into eternity.

The Lord taught that a blind man cannot lead another blind man - that a lost person cannot rescue a lost person. That is to say that only after I have matured, can I lead others to maturity.

CONCLUSION

To those who prepare and strive to reach spiritual maturity, God promises *“that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”* 1 Corinthians 1:7-9, KJV.

Notes

LESSON 12

GOOD TREE OR BAD TREE

What do you think of this phrase? "To be good only to yourself is to be good for nothing!" (Voltaire)

Luke 6:43-45: "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh...."

INTRODUCTION

In this scripture, Jesus compares us to good or bad trees, depending on the kind of person we are. This is an analogy in which our behavior is equivalent to the fruit of the tree because just as the fruit allows us to identify the tree, our actions show the type of person we are. Our facts result from our internal reality, from what we really are; and from what we are springs everything else: what we do, what we talk, even what we think...

THINK GOOD

In Psalm 139:1-2, David affirms that God knows and examines each of our thoughts. Wow! And what do we usually think? What things occupy our mind? It is necessary to learn to control what we think, because what is in our minds will affect who we are, negatively or positively. Hence, Christians give so much importance to the wise choice of reading material, music, company, conversation and entertainment.

It is true that we cannot entirely control the worldly environment in which we live most of the time, but what would contaminate our mental life can generally be avoided. It is a choice of our will. Our hearts will be purer if we avoid feeding the mind harmful things, and if we consciously practice having healthy thoughts (Psalm 19:14; Philippians 4:8).

SPEAK THE GOOD

“Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.” Proverbs 12:22. We must understand that God hates lies: *“ all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone...”* Revelation 21:8. God hates lies as much as he loves truth. In the same way, we must hate the lie and love the truth. Many tolerate the truth only; They don’t love her. How dangerous is this. Jesus is the Truth, His Word is the Truth, the Holy Spirit is the Truth. Not to love the Truth is to reject Jesus, His Word and His Spirit. Many people do not receive the Holy Spirit, simply because they do not want to give up the lie in their lives. Read Psalm 119,142 at home; John 14:6; 16:13.

The truth always comes out because *“for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”* Matthew 12:34b. Something is not right in him who says he is full of the Holy Spirit but often lies. What excuses will a Christian give to lie? The children of God must be truthful at all times and circumstances. Read Psalm 15:1-5 at home; Proverbs 12:19; Zechariah 8:16; Malachi 2:6; Ephesians 4:25; 4:30; 5:9; 6:14.

DO GOOD

Let’s talk now about honesty, a virtue intimately related to the truth. God asks us to *“Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”* Romans 12:17b. Like lies, dishonesty does not fit in the life of a true child of God. The believer must always be honest in his private life; in his relationships with

the family, with friends; in business matters and in all areas. Honesty is not negotiable for God (Leviticus 19:11). Honesty is goodness, which in turn is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:21-22). Therefore, dishonesty is evil, and for this reason the Holy Spirit will not dwell in the heart of a dishonest person.

Great actions are nothing more than extensions of small actions. Small facts of dishonesty will grow unfailingly. We must be completely clean in our dealings with others. What we sow, we will reap: if we sow honesty, we will be honored and blessed by God. Read Leviticus at home 19:35-36; Proverbs 11:1; Galatians 6:7.

BE GOOD!

Of course, no one goes to heaven for being good, but by the grace of God; but Jesus commands us to be kind to everyone, even to the wicked so that we can be called children of the Most High! (Luke 6:35-36). Jesus also commands us to be humble and obedient to Him (John 14:15; 1 Peter 5:6). By obeying him, we show him our love, and testify to the world that we love God. The most powerful evangelism is our testimony.

God also asks us to have self-control. His Word says that *"He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly."* Proverbs 14:17. Anger is a weapon of the flesh; it is a precursor to many painful things; it leads to bad decisions, hate, bitterness, murders and wars. Anger is a diabolical weapon that destroys marriages, homes, churches and even nations. There is only one anger that is constructive: anger against sin; but even then, we must take care of our reactions. The best example is given by our Lord, who is meek and humble of heart; slow to anger, great in mercy, patient and kind as anyone. Study at home: Mark 3:1-6; John 2:13-16; Ephesians 4:26; Psalm 103:8-9.

Here is another important issue: discipline. Only through discipline can we develop the strength of character necessary to face adversities without fainting. Being holy, being good, implies and demands discipline. Discipline is the key to power, it is the mark of maturity. How can anyone deny himself and follow Christ carrying his cross every day, if he has no discipline?

The undisciplined are inconstant and double minded people; they are easy prey for the deceiver. But the disciplined believer develops the ability to regulate his behavior by principle and judgment, instead of impulses, desires, pressure or social custom; He has the ability to voluntarily subordinate his appetites, emotions, mood and words. The disciplined Christian is the winner of temptation, and lives subject to the authorities. Study 1 Corinthians 9:25 at home; Hebrews 12:11; 13:17; James 1:26; 3:2.

CONCLUSION

In this lesson, we have summarized very broad topics. We will conclude by saying that to become "good trees" our root must be in God. Prayer, adoration, communion with God, are the spiritual root through which He revives and transforms us.

Do you want to be a true Christian? Seek much more from God; Renounce all evil, allowing Him to turn you into a good tree, full of good fruits, for the glory of His Name!

Notes

LESSON 14

TO REMAIN

1 John 3:24 *"Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."*

INTRODUCTION

A blessed encounter with God at any point in our lives, is never enough. It isn't enough even if you have been serving the Lord for years or decades. Not even a very fruitful ministry for a long period of our lives is good enough. We need to do good until the end. We need to successfully finish our course. We must remain permanent.

Let's discuss the law of permanence.

THE STORMS

The opposite of permanent is temporary. A very important question is this: are we permanent or temporary? 1 John 2:28: *"And now, little children, abide in Him, that [a]when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."* We cannot permit our relationship with God to be destroyed over time, or that the circumstances over time kill our fruits and burn our roots.

God's mission in our life has no expiration date. Our contract with the Kingdom of God is permanent. We can change jobs, homes or schools, but we cannot change from this path to another: 2 Timothy 4:10: *"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica."* In other words, this disciple loved what was temporary more than the permanent.

It does not please us to see in the Scriptures people who began their walk so marvelously and ended so distressingly. Who wouldn't be perplexed by Solomon's attitude in his final days? We resist believing that such wisdom did not follow him to the grave. But that's not what happened. And Judas? How could he commit such vileness after spending so much time with the Master? It certainly was not an issue of the Sower or the seed. Truly, it was the soil that was bad.

Two thirds of the people mentioned in the Bible finished badly. 67%. What were they thinking? Perhaps of the day to day? Surely about their personal goals and not eternity. These people did not believe in the law of permanence. The life of Christ within us is eternal (permanent) and our fruitfulness should also be eternal or permanent. Those who live thinking about the temporary always finish badly. Do you not desire to finish your life well? Who are those who finish well? Those who remain permanent will finish well.

THOSE WHO REMAIN

When reading the Bible, those who bring us Joy, are those who persevered until the end. Those who remained faithful. But more than anything, they pleased God. They fought the good fight, finished their course and kept their faith. They died loving God with the same love that they had loved him with since the beginning. They served Jesus with the same strength, the same zeal and the same spirit, to the end.

Time did not burn out the fire in their hearts that was ignited by God himself. Their earthly lives ended, but their flame continued to burn after their deaths: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' "Yes," says the Spirit, *"that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."* Revelation 14.13. Their lives on Earth ended, but their works did not. The result of their works continues. They finished well. They remained. And we also can do it:

“each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.”
1 Corinthians 3.13–14.

The apostle Paul speaks there of the Court of Christ, before which we, the church, will appear. The works done in this life for the Glory of God are the only ones that remain. There is only one way to remain in those works throughout this life; and there is only one way to end this life well: having a permanent relationship with God!

A PERMANENT RELATIONSHIP

The Spirit is not like matter. Matter certainly becomes corrupted with age, while internally, we can grow stronger every day:

“Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” 2 Corinthians 4.16.

He who began a good work in you is powerful enough to perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ. The Grace that reached you is the same that will help you bear fruit until the end, like Paul: *“ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”* 1 Corinthians 15:10.

Someone could object by saying: *“I have too many problems; too many sins in my life.”* But the Word says that *“... where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.”* Romans 5:20.

LESSON 15

INEVITABLE

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word “inevitable”?

Amos 4.12: *“Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!”*

INTRODUCTION

A person can search for God in this world and find him; He can serve and love him with all his heart; Or you can reject it and deny it. We call that freedom of choice “free will.” Using his free will, he can even say that God does not exist. However, at some point in their history, he or she will have to meet Jesus and answer for their actions:

Acts 9.3–5: *“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”* As you can see, God is inevitable for every human being. Nothing and no one escaped or escaped from Him. Again, someone can insist until they are tired saying that there is no God. You can write books trying to prove your claims. You can even organize conferences denying the divine reality. But no attempt to deny God will really work, for God is real, in fact, He is the final Reality to whom everyone will give an account:

"All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Hebrews. 4.13. Nothing can change the fact that we are all going to have to meet God, now or in eternity. Not thinking about this does not make God cease to exist.

Someone can silence his conscience, but he cannot silence the voice of the Lord. Someone can dope or get high until they forget who he is, but even that will not change at any point who God is. He is inevitable for every human being and it makes no sense to hide from Him. There are no hiding places when it comes to God:

"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall [b] fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me." Psalm 139.7–11.

What do you think is better? Meeting God after this life? Or now? Now is the time to think about Him! Not to say "later I will think of Him" like the Athenians who said to the apostle Paul "we will hear you again some time." Everything indicates that there was not a next time.

Some philosophers have taught that it was man who created God. Even they will discover one day, to their own terror, that God is the Creator and we are mere creatures; that *"It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves."* Psalm 100.3

Our intelligence and creativity cannot erase God, no matter how much we want. He fills it all: *"Am I a God near at hand, says the Lord, And not a God afar off? Can anyone*

hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him? says the Lord; Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.”
Jeremiah 23.23,24 DHH.

No one runs away from God. Just try to run away, and such an attempt is nothing but nonsense. No action, no philosophy, no brilliant idea of man can eliminate God, ever. Someone can deny the existence of the Sun and hide from it in the deepest part of the Earth. However, the Sun will remain, bright as it always has been.

Sooner or later everyone will have to meet God because, again, **HE IS INEVITABLE**. So what is the wisest and most sensible thing that you and I can do? Undoubtedly, surrender our life completely to Him.

CONCLUSION

Where are you now? Have you already given your life to Him? Do you live near or far from God? Are you ready to meet Him? Have you been born again through water and the Spirit? Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus? Do you really know Him, or have you only heard of Him?

Any position in life far from Jesus will always be insecure, for the safest place in the universe is to be in His powerful hands. And remember: **OUR GOD IS INEVITABLE**.

“Therefore [...] prepare to come to meet your God.”
Amos 4.12.

Notes

LESSON 16

NEW IMPULSE

Why do we get discouraged or tired?

Exodus 14.15: *“Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.”*

INTRODUCTION

Do you know what is inertia? Inertia is the name of a law of physics that states that a body will always continue its movement, unless another force acts on it.

When we drop a ball or marble on the floor and it is moving, you will see that it continues to move, until the friction with the floor, the force of gravity that pulls it down, and even the simple contact with the air, it makes the ball stop. It stops it. For the ball or marble to move again, a new impulse is necessary.

SPIRITUAL INERTIA

As in the natural world, certain laws govern the spiritual world. In our spiritual life a certain “law of inertia” also applies. Let’s see how it works.

By giving our life to Jesus and being born again through water and the Spirit, we receive from God a great impulse to do His will and walk in his path. We begin to walk with joy, courage, full of hope and faith. It was like those feelings would never end, but nevertheless we live in an imperfect world, and our spiritual life suffers daily friction. We call this “opposition.”

OPPOSITION

Let’s look at some types of opposition that believers experience:

(1) We suffer opposition from evil spiritual forces. *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* Ephesians 6.12.

(2) We suffer opposition from this world contaminated by sin. Jesus said: *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation...”*

John 16.33a. The reason for the opposition of the world is that we *“are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”* 1 John 5.19. The world hates us for being children of God. When speaking of *“world”* the Bible does not refer to the planet, but to the prevailing system. You need to understand that the world system is completely diabolical, and therefore an enemy of God. It is a very strong current that we must face.

(3) The third thing we suffer is the opposition of our own human nature, fallen by sin: *“The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.”* Galatians 5.17.

So we face opposition from the spiritual forces of the evil one, from the world - which is the enemy of God - and from our own sinful nature. It is that opposition that explains why it happens to us that we have been walking well, and suddenly, suddenly, we feel difficulties to continue moving forward. We need a **NEW IMPULSE**.

NEW IMPULSE

This is so ... we always need new “pushes” from God. We need the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or a renewal of it, daily. Another “push” can be a specific Word in a meeting like this; some Word read in the Bible at home, an experience in prayer, a miracle of God, or a new door that opens. Then we get motivated and move forward again. But only those who expose themselves to God and His Word receive new impulses. Only those who are constant in prayer, Bible study and participation in the church receive the necessary momentum to continue moving forward.

CONCLUSION

Your life cannot stop. You cannot allow the frictions of this life to cause you to lose the brightness and passion that God ignited in your life. Expose yourself to God every day. Remain before Him, always. Ask God constantly to renew your love, your faith and your hope. Yesterday’s bread does not work today. Yesterday’s victory is over and God has more for you. Do not accept cooling, discouragement, spiritual immobility. God wants you to advance.

Exodus 14.15: *“The Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward.” “Rise up and walk! ”—Said Peter and John to the paralytic (Acts 3.6). Be strong and cry out! (Galatians 4.27).*

Why not say it now in prayer? Lord, I need a new impulse!

Notes

LESSON 17

TRUE COMMUNION

What do you think of pretending?

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 133: *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forevermore.”*

Relationships without conflict does not necessarily indicate communion. Whether at home, in a cell group, in the church, there are often relationships that do not go beyond indifference, a “political” strategy, or even a prudent truce.

WHAT GOD DESIRES

Within indifference there are no fights, strife or friction. There’s only bland and tasteless silence. Within indifference, people will coexist and interact as little as possible in an effort to avoid conflict. “Everyone minds their own business”.

Whoever observes that calm environment, here or wherever, will judge it in a healthy and sufficient manner. Afterall, *“A bad peace is always better than a good war”, correct? But nevertheless, that is not the communion that God desires to find among his own. That does not represent the divine ideal of brothers that live in that union that “is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron...”* Psalm 133.2.

As good as it sounds, this is not a union. It just two people walking side by side while avoiding the slightest of contact....

- How are you?
- Good, Thank God

The first person would think, "Okay, I asked him. I've done just enough...", but we can ask: Are you sure? Is that all that can be done for today in terms of communion?

ISOLATION IS NOT THE REMEDY

There are brothers who are like the hedgehog, rodents who are not very social to say. The hedgehog will build caves within the earth that will connect with others, but almost always live separated from others. It is only when winter arrives that they group together to fight the cold through body heat. The hedgehogs will begin to approach each other, but when they do, their quills stick in the other and the pain caused by these punctures leaves them no other alternative but to separate again back to social isolation.

Many live what is a vicious circle. They get close to others and then they separate. They get closer and then they separate. Ask yourself with all sincerity: "Do I have quills in my life that make me live away from others and that drive others away from me? Are there attitudes of mine that distance others? Distancing yourself may seem like the solution because it prevents conflicts and wounds, but it also interrupts communion and therefore prevents God's blessing.

Distancing and isolating yourself interrupts "...*the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forevermore*" Psalm 133. We learn an important divine law from Scripture: Without true communion there is no true blessing. We need to...

COME TO AGREEMENT

The Bible says that two cannot walk together for long without them being in agreement. The fact that I don't disagree with my brother in Christ does not indicate that we both are in communion. Nor does it mean that our lives are in unity in a single spirit and that Spirit of God flows among us in one body.

The only thing "not fighting" means is that I have isolated myself from my brother enough to walk beside him without our souls touching. I'm a hedgehog in my small cave! I am not being the blood and life of the body of Christ!

We have seen what God can do when he finds a group, large or small, that not only says that they are in communion with Him, but in Him there is true communion with one another.

It is then that the Holy Spirit operates, flows, and makes his presence felt. When two or three are truly in agreement on something, our Lord Jesus Christ will ensure of making it so. Matthew 18:19: *"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask for, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven."*

TOGETHER WE GROW

We need forgiveness, tolerance, brotherly love, and communion; not only to be gathered together, but also united in one heart and spirit. Not just together, but also unanimous in the love of the One who called us to walk in Him.

1st John 1.6,9-10: *"He who says that he remains in Him must walk as He walked. He who says that he is in the light, and hates his brother, is still in darkness. If we walk in light, as He is in light, we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. He who*

LESSON 18

MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST: PART 1

Have you ever felt numbness somewhere in your body?

Ephesians 4:15-16: *“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”*

INTRODUCTION

The reason why the Church is alive today is that Christ himself has lived in it through generations. In fact, the Church is His Body. The Word of God compares the Church with several things: a family, a flock, a bride, a building and a body; but none of these allegorical portraits is as clear, as direct and blunt, as that of the Body of Christ. The Church is not like a body, the Church is the body of Christ! This analogy is very appropriate, full association and easy to understand. Let's study it ...

HOW WE BECOME MEMBERS

We all know that a body has to have a head and several members cooperating together; so, it is also with the body of Christ, the Church, where Christ is the Head. This truth has some determining implications regarding our association with the Church and our participation in it.

Each member of the body of Christ has been placed there by Him, with a special purpose; each one is really important and has a unique role to play: *“Because just as the body is one, and it has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so is Christ. Because by*

one Spirit we were all baptized in one body, whether Jewish or Greek, whether slaves or free, and we were all given the drink of the same Spirit. "1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

In this biblical text, the Word of God beautifully portrays the way we have been placed in the body of Christ; the way we have achieved membership in the body of Christ: through the exclusive operation of the Holy Spirit. Each of us has received his experience of salvation directly from God, in a supernatural way, as can be seen in Acts 2:47: *"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* How does the Lord do this?

In Acts 2:38 there is the only true plan of salvation; the basic requirement to obtain our membership. There we find Peter establishing or opening the entrance to the body of Christ through obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the only gateway to the Body of Christ: *"Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."* Hence the importance we have as members of the Church, for we have entered it as redeemed souls with the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MEMBERS

God has put every member in the body as He has agreed. Just as the members of a natural body - for example the human body - are important to each other in one way or another; so also in the body of Christ. Whether we realize it or not, the members of this Body need each other. Even the one that is apparently unnecessary is a vital member in the whole of the Church.

The importance of each member of the body becomes evident when we consider that each one has a role to play. Without the contribution of any of the members, the whole suffers. We all have a role to play. None is more or less

important than another, because God makes us dependent on each other. Although not everyone has the same function, we cooperate together as a body. There is unity in our diversity.

Let's read 1 Corinthians 12:14-20: *"For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body."*

Each member is of equal value to produce a perfect body! Therefore, and although each of us has been given an individual place, a specific function or ministry; we cannot act separately from the body and survive. God has placed each of us in our particular place, and there can be no schism or division; otherwise, necrosis occurs - the death of the member. Each member must and needs to be attached to the Body, and subject to the Head.

HEAD

"Christ is the head of the church ..." Ephesians 5:23. "And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." Colossians 2:19.

It is very clear in the Scriptures that Christ is the Head of the Church. We must be careful not to change this model. God has said that He is the fundamental authority and the expert teacher in His Church. The body can only function with the direction of a head. In the true Church of God there

LESSON 19

MEMBERS OF THE BODY OF CHRIST: PART 2

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word 'integration'?

1 Corinthians 12:27: *"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."*

INTRODUCTION

There is only one Head and one body that is the unique Church of Christ. This same singular head application can be made with respect to the local church. There is only one head of a congregation, the Pastor, who is under the direction of the Lord. The Pastor is the highest human authority and occupies the highest office of the local church. He receives his authority from his Head: Christ.

To be a member of a body working in harmony with its natural head (the Pastor) and its supernatural head (Christ), is to experience a feeling of security and peace that is above all others. There is no more beautiful example of God's perfect plan than an assembly working together.

Ephesians 4:15-16 - which we read in the previous lesson - describes the maturity and spiritual progress that results from a church that works as a body under the minister and under God; a church full of satisfaction and joy.

These happy people grow up *"...which is the head, even Christ From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."*

THE CHURCH OF GOD

Often, when someone mentions the word “church,” a building with a cusp and a cross come to mind. In our twenty-first century, sometimes we think more in terms of a brick building than in a body of believers. Other times, we think of the name of a particular denomination. But neither buildings nor organizations are the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is a living organism, a body of believers baptized, molded and united through the Spirit of God, locally and universally.

To fully understand our place in God’s plan, it is important that we understand the difference between Church (singular) and churches (plural). In the Scriptures, our Lord used the term “Church” only twice. In Matthew 16:18, He said: *“I will build my church.”* This refers to all the redeemed, their body of mystical, intangible, invisible believers, from all over the world and from past, present and future times. This is the universal Church.

The other occasion when He mentioned the word Church was in Matthew 18:15-17. Here he referred to a certain group of saints. This relates the concept of a body of believers present, visible and tangible with a place; the local church, a specific manifestation of the body of Jesus Christ.

This is the only church that you can become part of in a practical way. The local church is where there are real people with real needs and the only place where real ministry and growth can occur. Until we realize that we are an organ (members) of a current and visible body, we cannot properly relate to Christ or to those who constitute his Church. Someone who thinks that he is a member of the Body of Christ without belonging to a local church in a meaningful way, infers or implies that he is an organ independent of a body. This is not only logically ridiculous, but totally against the Bible. Every believer must be properly related to a local church that believes and preaches the truth.

COLLABORATORS

Just as your local church collaborates with the work of God in its own city, so does it in district programs. This includes fellowships, camps and conventions, where saints and ministers from many other local assemblies congregate to worship, achieve a broader vision and further advance the work of the Lord.

An individual church cannot cover many areas on its own, but when associated with other equal assemblies, the efforts become very effective. This is why your local church is part of national and international districts and programs. Local churches are encouraged to participate with other assemblies of precious and equal faith, not only at the district level, but also at the national and global levels. For this reason, every two years we celebrate an International General Convention, in which saints and ministers from all parts of America and the world meet to worship God together, and share visions and burdens with one another. It is a great occasion for fellowship and motivation.

The Apostolic Assembly is composed of several divisions: International Missions, Christian Education, Apostolic Men, "Dorcas" (Women), Youth, and other departments. The Dorcas (Women's) department gives an offering called "Blue Flower" every year, which is used to help our missionaries around the world.

Our missionaries also receive financial aid for the purchase of land, building of temples, purchase of vehicles and others. These donations of International Missions are to spread the Gospel around the world and money is obtained through Promises of Faith and Companions in Missions. This provides a local congregation or individual with the opportunity to promise a monthly offering for the support of a particular missionary. You can collaborate with the work of the universal (international) Church through your local church.

LESSON 20

WINNING FRIENDS FOR CHRIST:

PART 1

“Put yourself in their shoes.” What does that phrase mean to you?

2 Peter 1:5-8 KJV: *“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ....”*

INTRODUCTION

The basis of the process or trigger of winning our friends to the Lord Jesus Christ is the power of the Holy Spirit, as can be seen in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. And what is next? The relationships.

The fullness of the Holy Spirit in the early Christians resulted in a supernatural development in their interpersonal relationships: *“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* Acts 2:44-47.

Being a soul winner means dealing with people, and this, of course, is never easy, from a human perspective; but

when the power of God is manifested in our lives, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, our interpersonal relationships are taken to a whole new level.

Our success in bringing friends to the feet of Christ depends above all on the way we relate to them. That is why it is so important to develop in this area - the area of dealing with people. The following four questions are a brief evaluation to know if you are a person who is effectively related to others, if you are someone with the gift and ability to win friends for Christ:

1. Am I quick to respond to the needs of others?
2. Do I escape from problems, or do I look for solutions for them?
3. Is my way of speaking generally positive or negative?
4. Do I give others a second chance?

THE GOLDEN RULE

Now we will learn what the key is to relate to others in the best way, in order to win them to the kingdom of God. Christ gave us the basic rule for the establishment of quality human relationships; we call it the "Golden Rule." This is about learning to put myself in the place of others, instead of trying to "put others in their place" —in the latter many of us are more than experts!

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ summarized a series of deep thoughts about human behavior, and said: *"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."* Matthew 7:12. In this brief but crucial commandment, Christ teaches us two fundamental things regarding the development of excellent human relationships:

1. I must treat others as I would want them to treat me.
2. The way I treat others is a decision of mine.

What Christ was trying to say could be paraphrased like this: “Whatever your position in a relationship is, if you are aware of a problem or conflict, it is your responsibility to make the necessary effort to create a positive change. Stop pointing your revolver with your finger on the trigger or making excuses. Begin to be a catalyst, start demonstrating the right attitude. Decide to be a person with initiative and not a reactive person.”

WAYS IN WHAT WE WANT TO BE TREATED

Basically, there are five ways we all want to be treated. Today, we will consider two of them.

“I want others to encourage me.” The happiest people are those who invest their lives in others; the unhappiest are those who always think about how the world should make them happy. Raúl Meninger, a famous psychiatrist, was asked: What should a single and unhappy person do? His response was: “Unlock the door, go outside and look for a wounded and needy person.” The key is to forget yourself and serve others!

“I want others to appreciate me.” William James said: “The deepest principle of human nature is the desire to be appreciated.” We cannot underestimate the value of anyone, much less take advantage of others. A few years ago, a survey was carried out on different kinds of workers about what the main sources of disagreement in their work were for them. These were his six main answers:

1. Lack of recognition of contributions and suggestions.
2. Lack of stimulus.
3. Lack of correction of injustices and favoritism.

LESSON 21

WINNING FRIENDS TO CHRIST:

PART 2

"If you don't like what life is telling you, you must change what you are saying; because life is like the echo: only what we have said comes back to us."

What is your opinion about the previous thought?

INTRODUCTION

Let's reread 2 Peter 1:5-8 and Matthew 7:12. In the first part of this topic, we established that there are two basic elements for us to become good soul winners for Our Lord Jesus Christ: the first — of course — is the power of the Holy Spirit working in us; the second, interpersonal relationships.

Sometimes we feel rejection towards some people. That being the case, it is impossible for us to treat them well, at least not all the time. Other times, we think wonderful things about people, but we don't tell them. They will never realize what we think, unless we express it to them! Appreciation has no value, if all we do is think about it, but it becomes something valuable when we manifest it; and when we do, people respond the way we conceptualize them.

WAYS IN WHAT WE WANT TO BE TREATED

We have already studied two things that we all hope to receive from others: "I want others to encourage me" and "I want others to appreciate me." Now we will see three others:

1. "I want others to forgive me." A forgiving spirit is the basic ingredient for building strong relationships. Forgiveness frees us from guilt and allows us to act positively

with others. People who have difficulty forgiving do not relate in a genuine, much less pleasant way; they are, one of two: or very arrogant, or very insecure. Although holding a grudge produces some satisfaction, some immediate pleasure in one for the harm that one feels that does to the other, the damage that the angry person does to himself is greater. Lack of forgiveness produces emotional and physical stress, and many diseases. There are people who in order to be healed, need to confess and forgive before they pray as James 5:16 says.

Three days before he died, Senator Hubert Humphrey said: "At this point in my life, at sunset, all speeches, political conventions, crowds and big fights are behind me. At this moment, I feel forced to face my essence, to face what is really important. What I conclude about life is that, when everything has been said and done, what counts is how many people I've forgiven and redeemed so that they could move on."

Do you want to die victoriously? First, you have to live victoriously. And for that you have to tolerate and forgive. You have to be a person of inner peace. You cannot take others where you yourself have not gone. If you don't have peace, it's not because someone took it from you, but because you let it go. You can't always control what goes on around you, but you can control what goes on inside you. "You can't stop birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them from building a nest on it." Said a Greek philosopher.

If we do not have the peace of Christ, we can never bring others to the Lord. Really, the Christian has to be "unoffendable" in order to win his friends for Christ!

2. "I want others to listen to me." In his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey says: "Seek

to understand first and then be understood.” There is a big difference between hearing people and understanding them. Listening is wanting to understand, while a deaf ear is the first indication of a closed mind.

The natural tendency with the passage of time, with the accumulation of experience, with the years in the church, is the lack of patience to listen to those who come behind. Often “the cow forgets that it was veal.” When a person rises to a position, he tends to feel less obligated to listen. But his need to listen is at that time greater than ever.

If you have not acquired the habit of listening carefully and intelligently, you will not be able to obtain the necessary information, you will not be able to understand other people, you will not feel compassion for them, and they will not want to follow you, not even talk to you. Why would they waste their valuable time with someone who is not sincerely interested in them?

3. “I want others to understand me.” How do you feel when someone misunderstands you, or does not understand you, or does not care to understand you? Let’s say you have no interest in what happens to you. What kind of feelings arise in you? Do you feel lonely? Do you feel frustration? Disappointment? Anger? It’s the same as others feel when you don’t pay attention to them, when you don’t offer them understanding or compassion.

The lack of good communication results in:

1. 50% of all divorces.
2. 60% of all economic breaks.
3. 90% of all crimes.
4. Incalculable defections in the Church.

Good communication is the basis of progress!

BRIEF COURSE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

So far, we have said that every human being expects others:

- (1) Encourage him.
- (2) Appreciate him.
- (3) Forgive him.
- (4) Listen to him.
- (5) Understand him.

Now let's see a brief but powerful course of interpersonal relationships, with only seven sentences:

CONCLUSION

Remember this: Your success in winning your friends for Christ depends on your ability to relate to them in a healthy and positive way. The biblical key is to put yourself in the place of the other person, instead of wanting to *"put them in their place"* *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.*" Matthew 7:12.

In short, if you want to win many friends for Christ, you have to treat them the way you want them to treat you: encourage, appreciate, forgive, listen and understand. And remember that the word "you" is the most important! Don't you think so?

What do you think of all this?

Notes

LESSON 22

BREAKING THE DEVIL'S CHAINS:

PART 1

What does the word 'slavery' suggest?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Ephesians 6:10-20. This passage says that, as the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are in a spiritual war, a war that develops in the reality of our lives. Unfortunately, some believers are defeated in their Christian life because they deny, ignore or don't care about this reality.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE ENEMY

Many Christians today underestimate the power and influence of the devil in their lives and in the midst of the Church. Some even believe that they are not sensitive to the influence of demonic activity. Those who think like this often use the text of 1 John 5:18 as an argument, which says: *"We know that everyone who has been born of God does not practice sin, because He who was begotten by God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him."* In this Biblical text, what we have is a clause that states that the Christian who departs from sin, God keeps them and the devil does not touch them. It does not say that the devil can never touch a Christian. Let's see why.

If Satan could not touch the Christian, why do we receive instructions to put on the armor of God, resist the devil, remain unwavering and always watch? If we were not vulnerable to being hurt or trapped in Satan's traps, why does the Apostle Paul describe our relationship with the powers of darkness in terms of a terrible battle? The answer is that we are in a spiritual war, this is not optional for us and it is a matter of life or death.

Those who deny our enemy's potential to destroy us are the most vulnerable to their attack. Satan is a deceiver, and will do what is possible and impossible to work in a hidden way. If Satan and his demons make a Christian be deceived and surrender to sin, they immediately lose the guarantee of God's protection.

Many do not like to talk about these issues, but Jesus talked about them, and he did so because it was necessary to emphasize the darkness so that His light shone even stronger. According to Jesus' teaching, the function of the enemy is none other than to steal, kill and destroy: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it in abundance."* John 10:10.

1 John 5:19 tells us that those who are without Christ are under the dominion of the evil one, of the prince of the power of the air: *"... the whole world is under the evil one."* On this same, Ephesians 2:1-3 says: *"... you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."*

Now let's read Revelation 12:7-12. This biblical passage teaches that our enemy is working very actively in this world, and he does so because he knows that he has little time left. That is why the Apostle Peter warns us: *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* 1 Peter 5:8.

WE NEED TO WAKE UP!

With all these biblical texts, we want to help you understand that our enemy is active and has power to cause harm in the lives of believers; that due to the lack of holiness, prayer and perseverance in the faith, many Christians are bound, chained, prisoners, neutralized and slaves of the devil and his demons. Beloved brother, we are in a great spiritual struggle right now and our enemy shoots to kill!

Unfortunately, many believers live here in this world as if nothing was happening, as if there was no spiritual struggle; or at least as if in this fight the eternity of many people was not at stake. Many have forgotten God's commandments and advice regarding our enemy, and rest very comfortably.

Some believers are sleeping the dream of indifference, and do not perceive that their problems are not only physical, financial or relational, but that their problems also have spiritual causes. The sad truth is that in this last days there are many brothers who live enslaved by sin and the devil.

In that context, it is that Ephesians 4:27 tells us not to give "place to the devil." In that chapter, Paul has been telling believers of the time not to give sin a chance; for example, lies, anger, theft, dishonest words, bitterness, shouting and malice. When we allow these kinds of things in our life, we give space and authorization to Satan to rule our life.

This way, the believer who is free by the right conquered on the Cross, becomes enslaved to the enemy when he does not repent or turn to God. Where is the way out? The only way out is to obey the Lord again: *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* James 4:7.

LESSON 23

BREAKING THE DEVIL'S CHAINS: PART 2

Why do you think the enemy fights so hard against us?

INTRODUCTION

A good answer to this question is that the devil knows that Christians are the instruments that God is using in this world to end his dominion over many people; to free them from their power and that they may be saved in this last hour of the Church. For this reason, the enemy does everything in his power to neutralize and destroy us.

RELEASING GOD'S POWER

On one occasion, Jesus warned his disciples of this matter: "I saw Satan fall from the sky like lightning." But immediately he added a powerful promise: "*Behold, I give you the power to trample snakes and scorpions, and above all strength of the enemy, and nothing will harm you.*" Luke 10:18-19.

Then, in Mark 16:17-18 Jesus says: "*And these signs will follow those who believe: In my name, they will cast out demons; they will speak new languages; they will take snakes in their hands, and if they drink something deadly, it will not harm them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will heal.*"

Speaking of these promises of Jesus, the Apostle Paul concludes one of his letters and says goodbye saying: "*And the God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*" Romans 16:20.

These and several other writings teach us that believers now have the authority and power granted by God to crush Satan. More than that, Ephesians 1:21 says that God has placed us *“above all principality and authority and power and lordship, and above every name that is named, not only in this century, but also in the age to come.”*

What immense spiritual power we have received from the Lord to defeat through him the full force of the enemy! The Apostle Paul prayed that the churches under his supervision would understand and recognize this power they had as the Body of Christ and exercise such power to destroy the works of the devil and gain lives for Christ. But he also taught them under what conditions the power of God is released in our lives and Jesus’ promises of victory can be realized.

To the Corinthian brothers, he wrote: *“As we have these promises, dear brothers, let us purify ourselves from all that contaminates the body and the spirit, to complete in the fear of God the work of our sanctification.”* 2 Corinthians 7:1, KJV. And to the Ephesians he said that God *“chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and without blemish before him.”* Ephesians 1:4. So, we can only make use of the power and authority that God has given us, being subject to Him in holiness.

WE CLOSE EVERY GAP

Ecclesiastes 10:8 tells us that *“he who makes a hole will fall into it; and to the one who will contribute fenced, the snake will bite.”* Here we have a direct and simple analogy, which shows us that the ancient snake - the devil - will not miss any opportunity we give him; he will not miss any gap or open door from us. Many Christians today certainly open a large gap when they neglect their spiritual life and practice sin.

1 Peter 5:8 tells us about being sober and vigilant, because the devil walks around like a lion, looking for an opening in our life to attack us. Brother, friend, careful with gaps such as: anxiety, excessive worries, materialism, impatience, irritability, nonconformity, bad mood, complaints, criticism, aversion, resentment, hate, immorality, impurity, etc. If we do not close every gap with repentance and confession to God, surely our enemy will take advantage of it to catch us and destroy us. Let's read Ephesians 6:10-20.

Let's also read Acts 19:11-16. In this interesting incident, we see that Satan knows and fears consecrated Christians; but laughs at carnal believers. He works and deceives many believers to live a life without the grace and power of God. He involves these believers in matters of no importance to the Kingdom of God. For example, the devil rejoices watching believers fight against each other.

WE OBEY THE LORD

Today, there are few Christians who walk in true holiness. On the contrary, there are many people in the churches that live dominated by the devil through disobedience, rebellion and double life. There are too many brothers who at the beginning had a precious experience with Christ but later, on the way in their Christian journey, they allowed these things, being deceived by the father of lies. In many cases, they are even leaders. Let's read 2 Peter 2:19-20.

And many are being devoured for their lack of faithfulness. God dealt severely with the people of Israel about the issue of tithes and offerings, because they had disobeyed the ordinances on the subject. Let's read Malachi 3:10-12. The Lord had to allow devourer — the devil — to afflict them; but he also told them that if they returned to faithfulness, He himself would rebuke the enemy. When we obey the Lord, the devourer is rebuked and has to get away from our lives!

CONCLUSION

In these two lessons on spiritual warfare, we have talked about the way in which the enemy operates in the world, as well as the urgent need that believers in Christ Jesus have to wake up from the spiritual dream and walk in holiness in order to overcome the forces of the enemy. Ours is a call to war; not a war against flesh and blood, as Ephesians 6:12 says, but against principalities and powers that operate in the celestial regions.

Beloved brother, dear friend, today it is necessary for you to recognize that, although being a believer is a wonderful thing, it is not enough to believe in Jesus. It is also necessary to live in Him, to walk like Him. But to be able to walk with Him, you must first be free from any chain that the devil has placed on you and that is preventing you from being a blessing in the work of the Lord.

Jesus said: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.."* John 8:34. But then he promised that if we allow Him to set us free, then we will be truly free (V. 36).

Are you willing to make a serious commitment to Christ so that He can break every spiritual chain in your life? Let's pray.

Notes

LESSON 24

STILL WATERS:

PART 1

Have you ever reached the limit of your strength? Have you reached the point of being unable to move on? Share your experience.

INTRODUCTION

Let's read 1 Samuel 30:9-10. As believers in Christ; as spouses, parents, church members, workers, housewives or students; we have all ever reached the point where we could no longer hold on. One after another, we get the challenges, the unforeseen, the complications and the problems of life, but we don't know how to respond to them. We often feel unable to continue fighting, simply because we are exhausted. What shall we do when there is no longer strength to move forward?

Some of the men who followed David, tired of fighting, simply plunged into the Besor stream. The torrent or stream of Besor is not a well-known place in the Bible; It is not famous as Mount Horeb or the Jordan River, but it is certainly a place that must be taken into account by the exhausted people.

RUINED

This story occurs during the last days of Saul's reign over Israel. David was running away from Saul and hid among the Philistines. David and his men were on their way to a battle, to fight on the side of the Philistines, but the Philistines distrusted them and demanded that they go away. David then left with his men heading south, back to Siclago, where they lived; A three-day trip. Let's read 1 Samuel 30:1-6.

David's men cried for their women and their children abducted by the Amalekites; They cried until they ran out of strength. But very soon their sadness of them turned to anger against David. Why didn't David's men get angry at the Amalekites, instead they turned they anger against their leader? Because they blamed David for having led them to an alien battle, and for having left the women and children unprotected in Siclag. David was to blame for everything, and had to die for it!

THE WORST HOUR

David was already used to this kind of ordeal; ignored by his father, despised by his brothers, persecuted by King Saul ... only this was missing: that his men, the men whom he had helped so much, would stand up against him. David could have reacted like a psycho; He could have lost his temper, or argued strongly in his defense. After all, his family had also been kidnapped.

Like the others, he had the right to cry, lament and despair over the loss of his women and children. But David did something different: he put his trust in God and took courage. Verse 6 of this chapter tells us that David was strengthened in the Lord his God, and while six hundred men fanned their anger against him and gathered stones, David prostrated himself before his God, dressed in a priest's ephod.

Brothers, it is essential that we learn to do the same as David. In days of ruin and calamity; in days of despair and loneliness; in the worst hour of our life; when "nobody understands us," neither our family, nor the brothers of the church, not even the Pastor; When even old friends become enemies and it seems that no one can help us, we have to do what David did: turn to God. If we cry out to God with faith, He will answer us, as promised in Jeremiah 33:3. Let's also read verse 7.

WITHOUT DESERVING IT

1 Samuel 30:8, KJV: *“And David enquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.”*

We often think that to hear the voice of God we have to be special saints, extraordinary people; that God will only speak to very very spiritual and consecrated people. It is true that as children of God we must consecrate ourselves. David understood this and that is why he dressed in a linen suit, a priestly ephod, before prostrating himself before the Lord. The linen represents purity and holiness.

However, in Christ it is not about our own holiness, but about the holiness with which He has clothed us. Moreover, we cannot even be holy on our own; our own justice is unclean in the eyes of God; but if we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, if we place all our trust in Him and in what He did for us on the Cross, then we can calmly approach God and speak freely with Him, as David did. Undoubtedly, God will teach us what we need to know in that particular moment of our life.

UNABLE TO FOLLOW

Still dusted by the three-day trip they had just made; without having been fed or rested, David and his six hundred men go out to chase the Amalekites. Frustrated, distraught and still angry at David, the six hundred take an uncertain path. None knows very well where they are going. Only sustained by the fervent desire to embrace their beloved families again, and perhaps believing a little in God's promise to David: *“Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all,”* David's men marched until they reached the torrent of Besor. Let's read 1 Samuel 30:9-10 again.

Of the six hundred men, four hundred manage to cross the stream. The other two hundred get into the Besor, dive their tired body into the waters, cool their heads, but are no longer able to follow. They are too tired to continue, so they go out and lie down, with weapons and everything, on the green bank of the stream. But how tired does someone have to be to decide and abandon the mission of rescuing their own family? Can a soldier be exhausted to the point of allowing another to be the one to save his own flesh and his own blood?

Well, yes: these two hundred were so dejected and tired, that they only dropped by the Besor stream; and David continued without them.

IT'S OK TO REST

In the church, there are also fallen people next to the Besor. Understand: they are good people; they are pious brothers like so many others, but simply fatigue has consumed them. For whatever reason, a persistent marital problem, an ancient bond, a weakness difficult to combat; They are fallen by the stream. What to do with them? Do we declare them unpleasant people? Do we expel them from our ranks as weak and cowardly? Do we rebuke them? Do we shame them in front of the congregation? Or do we just let them rest?

David allows the two hundred to stay and continues with the four hundred. Now they are walking through a dreadful desert; up and down one dune after another ... but of the cunning Amalekites, not a trace. They are beginning to sink into the sands of discouragement, when suddenly someone would say they had "*a stroke of luck.*" Let's read 1 Samuel 30:11-19. As God promised them, so it happened. David and his army rescued every woman, every child, every treasure. Let us praise God for his faithfulness!

LESSON 25

STILL WATERS:

PART 2

Share something you remember from the previous lesson.

INTRODUCTION

Let's read 1 Samuel 30:9-10. In the last lesson, we began to share this story about King David, his 600 brave men, and the events that surrounded their lives when they went after the Amalekites in the desert, trying to rescue their families who had been kidnapped. Today, we will conclude this interesting topic.

NOT EVERYTHING WAS A PARTY

Will there be any sister here who can imagine how one of those women would feel while being dragged by the Amalekites into the desert? What would that mother think while she was kidnapped; taken away from her husband and home? Surely, she understood that she would never return, that she would never see her beloved husband's face again; and while he thought so, he hugged his children with more force ... Suddenly, and without ever having imagined it, the woman sees the good guys arrive; she sees them fight against the bad guys and defeat them; She is rescued unharmed from slavery and death. Hallelujah!

So, while a soldier unleashes her, she thanks David for coming to her rescue, and begins to search the soldiers for her man's face. -Dear! My husband, where are you?! But the soldier who is unleashing her says: Your "darling" fell asleep by a stream. "What did he do?" She shouts. "He is with the two hundred men in Besor." "With that Besor, eh!" Now I am angry!

The rescue squad now marches back to Siclag. They come triumphantly, with a big loot in his hands. As they leave the desert and approach the hill where the Besor descends, the four hundred begin to spot the camp of the two hundred that remained. What would the returning soldier think of those men who stayed to rest? "Those leeches! Me fighting for their families, and they sleeping!" "Will they think it's easy to defeat Amalekites?" And let's not mention a few wives who already thought "Where did I leave the rolling pin?"

FEAT TO COUNT

And how would that soldier who stayed to rest by the Besor stream feel while he watched the four hundred approach? His manhood on the ground ... a worm would have more self-esteem than he was at that time. *"And David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David, and to meet the people that were with him: and when David came near to the people, he saluted them. Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them ought of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart."* Vs. 21-22, KJV.

"Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day." Vs. 23-25, KJV.

Note this please: the two hundred never said they would stay to take care of the baggage; They simply stayed to rest. They stayed to do ... nothing! But David dignifies his decision to stay and grants him the title of "work." Among so many exploits that David did, one must also count this: he honored those soldiers who had no strength to continue beyond the Besor stream.

STILL WATERS

Is it a sin to rest when you can no longer? Is it wrong to stop by the Besor stream while others follow? It's fine that we rest from time to time. The Lord Jesus Christ said to come to Him all who are labor and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

Are you too tired to fight? Jesus is your David, who fights for you when you can no longer. Jesus does not get angry when you are weak and exhausted; on the contrary, He has run the waters of the Besor so you can cool down a bit, before continuing. The Besor stream. What a good name for a church! Isn't that what we say we are as a church: a place for the Lord's soldiers to regain their strength? Isn't that what we want?

This is what David the Psalm 23:2-3 was talking about. The waters of rest free us from arrogance; to think that our achievements come because humanly we have worked so hard. *"It was the Lord who gave us everything, and who protected us,"* said David to the wicked and selfish who did not want to share the spoils with their brothers. But victory comes from Christ, not from our efforts. Our achievements are not deserved. Salvation has come to us as an unexpected gift; just like that young Egyptian was put by God in David's way to guide him to the spoils. Who is the man so strong that he thinks that he has achieved everything alone?

Besor, the Church, is from God. He has founded it, and He sustains it. For Him, everyone counts: the strong and the weak. If you are strong, give glory to Him, but do not judge the weak. Never criticize the tired, because we all run out of strength at some point; we all need the waters of rest. Paul even says that the members of this body that are weaker are the most necessary (1 Corinthians 12:22). We should never get impatient with the weak, much less judge them, but love them more; for only God knows how much we need them.

CONCLUSION

The Besor also reminds us of another torrent of water; one who saw the Apostle John in the revelation of heaven that the Lord Jesus gave him. John saw a clean, glowing river; a river of waters of life, born from the throne of God (Revelation 22:1-2). Soon comes the glorious Day when we will reach that heavenly Besor; a river that runs and jumps for eternal life and healing of our life.

But you don't have to wait for another day to enter its salty waters, because that river is the Spirit of God that runs right now through this place. Who arrived today exhausted? Who came thinking you no longer wanted to continue? Is there anyone here who has been running out of strength lately? Come and immerse yourself in our Besor. Come and refresh yourself in the presence of our Lord Jesus, the source of living water.

Notes

LESSON 26

RESTORED ALTAR, LIVING SACRIFICE

Say what you think about this well-known phrase of King David: "I will not offer my God sacrifices that cost me nothing." Romans 12:1: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."*

INTRODUCTION

Having an altar restored in our generation is really a challenge. Many temptations are thrown at us every day. We are continually bombarded by sin, but as it says in Genesis 4:7, though *"...sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."* So, we need to take a dominant position on sin and our desires; reject even the idea of our altar being destroyed. We need our altar of worship restored to offer Him that living sacrifice that each one of us are.

SACRIFICE

Sacrifice, as the word says, comes from sacrificing, offering, delivering completely, delivering entirely. When we talk about living sacrifice, we talk about delivering everything that is alive in us; what it costs us. The greatest sacrifice we can give to God is our life, our body, our self. Let's read Romans 12:1 again.

We cannot arrive before God with what is left over. We need to come before Him with what it costs us, with "the Isaac" of our life. Let's see where this crucial issue arises. God said to Abraham: *"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and*

offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Genesis 22:2.

God asked Abraham to sacrifice ... his own son! And as Abraham did not refuse such a sacrifice, God honored him by calling him his friend: *“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.”* James 2:23.

By sacrificing the most valuable in our lives, we prove our love for God. When we present ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice, we can trust that He will not despise us, but quite the opposite: He will accept us and bless us. King David wrote: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”* Psalm 51:17.

GIVE UP

It is easier to serve God when the meaning of the word “give up” is well understood. The key word of this lesson is precisely “resignation.” Giving up means choosing to release a certain thing, such as my rights, wishes, etc.

Daily, we need to give up our own wills with the desire to, through obedience, keep our altar restored. We need to renounce the world, sin, the desires of the flesh and the passions of youth in order not to lose the presence of God in our lives and never accept that our altar be destroyed.

The latter was what sadly happened to Israel. Israel’s altar of worship in the time of Isaiah was damaged by their sin and needed a total restoration. The prophet admonished them like this: *“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”* Isaiah 59:2. And all this, because they did not want to give up their rebellion and hardness of heart ...

Renouncing also implies obeying, and obeying is itself a sacrifice; for this is bound to leave our own wills in order to obey an order given to us. To obey is better than to sacrifice trying to restore the altar with hands contaminated by caprice and pride: *"...Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."* 1 Samuel 15:22.

EXPERIENCES

"Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Psalm 50:14-15. Through the living sacrifice that we are, we can have great experiences with God, such as these:

1. Abraham received God's provision: *"Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."* Genesis 22:13.

2. The apostles gave their lives as a living sacrifice for the gospel and gained experiences of operating supernatural miracles. *"But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up."* Acts 9:40.

3. Daniel, when giving up his life as a sacrifice for faith in God, had the experience of liberation: *"My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt."* Daniel 6:22.

4. In the same way Ananias, Misael and Azariah in the blazing furnace of fire; and so many other men throughout the history of our faith in the one true God. Sacrifice in obedience to God will never be in vain!

LESSON 27

OUR FAITH PART 1

What does the word 'doctrine' mean to you?

INTRODUCTION

In this and the next lesson we will talk about very important issues, about the faith or doctrine of the Apostolic Assembly. Our church embraces the doctrine of the Oneness of God and practices water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ; which is why it is considered part of the "Jesus Name" movement and the "Oneness" movement. Our church also believes in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, so it is part of "Pentecostalism." We can then define ourselves as: Pentecostals in experience and Apostolics in doctrine.

THE BIBLE

Where does our doctrine come from? From the Bible, and this is so because we believe that she is inspired by God; that she is the infallible Word of God, as she herself affirms: *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* 2 Timothy 3:16.

The Bible presents divine truth to man; therefore, all doctrine, faith, hope, and all instructions for the Church must be based on — and harmonized with — the Bible. This sacred book must be read and studied by all men who want to know God. However, the Bible can only be understood by those who have been anointed with the Holy Spirit:

"The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." 1 John 2:27. *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy*

of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."
2 Peter 1:20–21.

THE ONLY TRUE GOD

We believe that there is only one infinite and eternal God in power; a God who is holy in nature, attributes and purposes. He is absolute, and his indivisible deity. This one true God revealed himself as Father in creation; as a Son in redemption; and as Holy Spirit in our hearts:

"But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." 1 Corinthians 8:6.
"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Ephesians 4:6.

2 Corinthians 5:19: *"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."*
Joel 2:28: *"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions."*

The Scriptures never try to prove the existence of God. They assume from the beginning and declare over time that the knowledge of God is universal, that it has been placed in the consciousness of the human being by God Himself: *"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them."* Romans 1:19. *"Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another."* Romans 2:15.

God is invisible, incorporeal, without parts, without body; and therefore, without any limitation. He is Spirit: *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* John 4:24. A spirit has no flesh or bones: *"Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."* Luke 24:39.

God is unique and indivisible. Mark 12:29: *"The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord."* Deuteronomy 6:4: *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord."* Ephesians 4:6: *"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."* As we said, He has manifested himself in several ways, being the most important: as Father in the Old Testament, as Son when dwelling in the flesh and as Holy Spirit pouring into our hearts.

The only true God, the Lord of the Old Testament, assumed the form of man, and as the Son of man was born of the virgin Mary. Paul says: *"And unquestionably great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen from the angels, preached to the Gentiles, believed in the world, received high in glory."* 1 Timothy 3:16. John declares: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* John 1:1.

This one and only true God was manifested in the flesh, in his Son Jesus Christ; *"Annihilating himself", emptying himself of his Divinity: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."* 2 Corinthians 5:19. *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell."* Colossians 2:9; 1:19.

Then, Christ in his humanity is man; but in his divinity, He is God. In His flesh was the lamb, the sacrifice for the Father; but

in His divinity, His is the same God who received the sacrifice. Therefore, Christ is the only mediator between God and man: *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."* 1 Timothy 2:5. He introduced himself to John and said: *"I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."* Revelation 1:8.

THE NAME OF JESUS

To present himself to man in the Old Testament, God used many titles, such as: Elohim, I Am, God, The Almighty, Jehovah, El Shaddai, The Lord and others. But titles are not names. The true name of God would not be made known until the time of the New Testament. Isaiah prophesied of this: *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."* Isaiah 9:6.

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled when the Son of God was appointed by the angel: *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."* Matthew 1:21. *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* Acts 4:12. Jesus is the name of God!

CONCLUSION

So far, we have seen the fundamentals of our doctrine: the divine inspiration of the Bible and the existence of a single God who has manifested to us fundamentally in Jesus Christ. In the next lesson, we will talk about man's sin and condemnation, as well as the salvation provided by God for him.

We are going to thank the Lord for allowing us to learn all these wonderful things.

LESSON 28

OUR FAITH PART 2

Condemnation. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear that word?

INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson, we brought two basic themes of our faith or doctrine: the divine inspiration of the Bible and the existence of a single God, whose name is Jesus and means “Jehovah is salvation.” Today, we will talk about the fall of man into sin, his consequent condemnation and the salvation brought by Jesus on the Cross of Calvary.

CREATION OF MAN AND HIS FALL

Who are we, where do we come from and where are we going? Were we created or evolved from another species? Why is man so different from other living beings? These and other questions are common, and all of us, consciously or unconsciously, have asked them at some point in life. Let’s see what the Word of God responds to that.

Contrary to what the theory of evolution says, man is a created being: *“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”* Genesis 2:7. Here it clearly says that God made man using as raw material the dust of the earth and his breath of life. Let’s also read Genesis 1:26-27.

Man was created in the likeness of God and given the government over animals, plants and everything on Earth. God’s purpose was for man to be holy, just as He is holy; but man sinned and from this sin resulted the corruption of humanity, and consequently death.

We are then created by God, but away from Him because of sin. With sin and fall, man became a being of a depraved nature, slave and sentenced to death; dependent on their own effort and work for survival. The Earth was also cursed and lost its vigor and productivity. Let's read Genesis 3:17-19.

But there is more. The Bible states that *"all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* Romans 3:23. Then he adds that *"the wages of sin is death"* but also that *"the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."* Romans 6:23.

REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION

The word "repentance" comes from the Greek "metanoia," which means changing views and purpose; change of heart, attitude and life; transformation, etc. According to the Bible, forgiveness of sins is obtained by sincere or genuine repentance; for a confession and abandonment of sins. John the Baptist and Jesus preached on this matter. In Luke 13:3 Jesus says: *"except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

The Apostles also preached repentance. For example, in Acts 2:38 Peter urges Jews and Gentiles alike to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of their sins. See also Acts 11:18; 17:30.

Before ascending to Heaven, Jesus ordered the Church *"that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* Luke 24:47. And that is what we are doing here.

THE BAPTISM IN WATER

The biblical way of water baptism is immersion, and it is exclusively for those who are well repentant, that is, who have left their sins and their love for the world. Therefore, water baptism is not valid for children, since they are innocent, free from sin.

Baptism must be ministered in obedience to the Word of God by a duly authorized minister of the Gospel, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the following Scriptures: Acts 2:38; Acts 8:16; Acts 10:48; Acts 19:5. In a next lesson we will talk more about this important topic.

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the Old Testament, God said through the prophet Joel: *"it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions."* Joel 2:28. At the beginning of the New Testament, John the Baptist says: *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."* Matthew 3:11. And Jesus final promised: *"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."* Acts 1:5.

All these promises were fulfilled in that Pentecost celebrated ten days after Jesus ascended to Heaven. Acts 2:4 tells us that " they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Is it biblical to expect that all who receive the baptism or fullness of the Holy Spirit will show the same physical sign or initial evidence, which is speaking in tongues? Yes! Speaking in other languages or languages is also mentioned in Acts 10:46 and Acts 19:6. And it is clear that the expressions - used alternately in the Bible - *"to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire"*, *"to be filled with the Holy Spirit"* and *"to receive the Holy Spirit"* are also appropriate and have the same meaning.

Referring to this phenomenal experience, Peter said:

"...Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:33, 39.

On the other hand, we also have the gift of tongues, which is described in 1 Corinthians 12:14. This is equal to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in essence, but having a different function or purpose; Therefore, they should not be confused.

CONCLUSION

As we said in the previous lesson, the basic or fundamental doctrine of our church is based on the Bible; and only by following this divine order or plan for man can we obtain salvation. This plan consists of:

- (1) Repentance.
- (2) Baptism by immersion in water in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (3) Receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the initial sign of speaking in other languages.

Of course, in order to take these steps, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is needed, because only through faith in Him can we be justified or freed from the condemnation of sin: *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Romans 5:1.

In a next lesson, we will talk about holiness and faithful service to God, as equally important elements of the divine plan of salvation for man. Meanwhile, what steps will you take this week to increase your faith in Jesus and learn more about these important issues?

LESSON 29

WHERE WILL I GO AFTER THIS LIFE

Do you think there is life after this life? Why?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Luke 16:22-28. When a person dies, his body goes to the grave and goes into decay; but his soul does not die, but is separated from the body and taken to a state that the Bible compares to the dream. There he remains awaiting the resurrection or future meeting of the soul with a new body, an immortal spiritual body with which God will clothe every human being who has lived on Earth.

HADES AND PARADISE

Souls do not all go to the same place after this life. While the soul of the wicked — the one who dies without God — waits in a place of restlessness, the soul of the righteous rests in peace. The temporary room for the souls of all the dead before the resurrection of Christ was Sheol - a Hebrew word that means "enclosure or precinct of the dead" and which corresponds to the word Hades of the New Testament. However, in that place there was a border or separation between disobedient and just souls. Therefore, while the beggar rested in the "bosom of Abraham," the rich man was "in torment" V. 23.

Psalms 16:10 and Acts 2:27 say: *"Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."* David trusted in the promise of resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and his consequent victory over death; and this was fulfilled when Christ rose on the third day - before his body decomposed. Thanks to this, Jesus defeated Hades and death, and one of the results of His victory was that he rescued righteous souls from that place (Ephesians 4:8-10).

From then on, when a Christian dies, his soul does not go to Hades along with disobedient souls, but instead goes to rest directly with God. There are many Scriptures that teach this, but here we will only quote two: *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."* 2 Corinthians 5:8. *"having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."* Philippians 1:23 KJV.

"I HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE I DIE"

Maybe you think you have many years ahead. But who knows that for sure? Today we're here, tomorrow ... we don't know.

Now, beyond the years of life that God has given each one of us, in the Bible we are told of a great event, which is about to occur, called "Rising of the Church"; also "Rapture". This is a matter of the greatest importance to us, because according to the Scriptures, the rapture will be how our Lord Jesus Christ takes us to Heaven to live with Him.

The moment the Rapture occurs, the dead in Christ will be resurrected and the believers that we live will be transformed; and we will all receive glorified, perfect and immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-54; Philippians 3:20-21 and 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18). Here, we are told something precious: we will find the Lord in Heaven and continue to live with Him for eternity.

The Church lives waiting for *"that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."* Titus 2:13. But the Bible also says that the instant the uprising of the Church occurs, a time of incomparable tribulation or suffering will reach the world. Let's read Matthew 24:21. And study chapters 6 through 19 of Revelation at home. There we are taught that the Lord Jesus will bring judgment on Earth, because of sin and evil that have reigned over it for centuries.

At that time, when we are no longer here, Satan will rule the world through a man that Revelation calls Antichrist, and a system described as The Beast. There will also be a spiritual leader called False Prophet, who along with the Antichrist will control the world, politically, economically and religiously. These satanic maneuvers will bring many wars, famines and death.

At a certain point in this period, the Antichrist will pretend to be God and desecrate the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, which by that time will be rebuilt. Those who oppose this impious system will be persecuted and martyred; although some will have divine protection. At the height of this satanic government, God will pour out His judgment on humanity through several great plagues (Revelation chapters 6 to 18).

FIRM PROMISES

Many believe that the Church will be raised before the Great Tribulation. Others instead think that the Church will go through a part of it, or through all of it. What we can assure is that the Church will be protected from the wrath of God: *"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."* Revelation 3:10.

After these and other important events that Revelation describes, our Lord Jesus Christ will physically return to Earth with His saints, descending on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 12:4; Acts 1:9-12; Revelation 19). The Jews will finally recognize Jesus as their Messiah and the Lord will destroy the beast and his armies.

The events that will follow - the reign of Jesus for a thousand years, the final rebellion of Satan, the destruction of the present creation by fire and the Last Judgment of God - are events that we will not further delve into. However, there

are two important things that we should mention, according to Revelation 21 and 22 (read it at home):

(1) Christ's firm promise to us his Church, to take us to live forever with Him in a new Heaven, in a magnificent city called The New Jerusalem. (2) Jesus' claim that he will throw into the "Lake of Fire" or Hell all those whose names were not found inscribed in the Book of Life. Hell means "eternal separation from God."

CONCLUSION

The signs prior to the second coming of Christ that the Bible mentions, are being fulfilled today, with all accuracy. Study Matthew 24 at home; Luke 21 and 2 Timothy 3. The present age will end when the Lord Jesus raises his Church "in the blink of an eye." No one knows the day or time when this will happen, but we are sure it will happen very soon.

You and I must be prepared for it, at all times, *"knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light."* Romans 13:11–12.

Brother, friend, do you know where you will go after this life, what will be your final destination? You must decide as soon as possible whether you will face the judgment of God and its consequent hellish punishment, or if you will be raised with the Church to receive the reward of eternal life.

What is your decision? Do you want to be saved? In the next lesson, we will show you the steps you must take to do this.

LESSON 30

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED

PART 1

Mention something that makes you sad.

INTRODUCTION

What are the necessary steps to receive salvation for your soul? The three biblical stories that we will share next teach us. The stories are different in several ways, but they have one point in common: the people involved, regardless of the knowledge and faith they had in God, were not yet saved.

THE JAILER

It was past midnight when the jailer on duty decided to take his own life. He held the sword firmly against his chest when suddenly a shout from inside one of the cells asked him not to commit such madness. Frightened, he put the sword aside and ran to the cell from which the scream had come out. He was stunned then, how, in that darkness, did anyone know he was going to kill himself?

Upon entering the cell, the jailer found two kneeling men praying to God and, tremulously, he asked them: *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."* Acts 16:30-31. Immediately, the jailer took the two servants of God from prison and took them to his house, where with his family they heard the preaching of the Word of God.

As a result, *"...he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house."* Acts 16:33-34.

CORNELIO

It was almost three in the afternoon when a pious man named Cornelius was praying to God. In the city, he was considered a God-fearing man, who gave alms to those in need. That evening while he was praying, he saw an angel of God who spoke to him: *“And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”* Acts 10:5-6. Quickly, Cornelius sent three of his employees to the place indicated by the angel to bring Peter; meanwhile, he gathered all he could in his house. When Peter arrived, the house was full of people.

Peter preached the Word of God and before he could finish his sermon, God poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit upon all who heard the Word. Amazed, the Apostle commanded that everyone be baptized in the waters in the name of Jesus Christ: *“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.”* Acts 10:44,48.

THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN

On a dusty road near Damascus in Syria, God had called Paul to preach the Gospel. One day, after a very tiring journey, he arrived in a city where he found twelve men who were also preachers. Paul immediately asked them about their knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Seeing that they ignored fundamental things, Paul showed them in Scripture that his teaching was incomplete. The twelve men believed in the Gospel that Paul preached to them and immediately they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ; then, they were also filled with the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in new languages. Let's read Acts 19:1-6.

TO BE SAVED

To be saved, something more is necessary than saying “I believe”, “I already accepted Jesus” or “I am already an evangelical”. To be saved, it is not enough to be religious and give alms. Not even those who preach the Word of God should be judged as being saved for being preachers. To be saved it is necessary to believe in the complete Gospel of Jesus Christ, which presents to us repentance, water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit as fundamental requirements for salvation. Let’s now look at the first of these three very important elements.

REPENTANCE

The Bible defines repentance as a sadness produced by God, which separates us away from sin, makes us change our lifestyle: *“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”* 2 Corinthians 7:10, KJV.

How can we repent? To obtain the repentance of God in our lives we need to hear the preaching of the Gospel and believe in him:

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:15-16.

And when repentance reaches our hearts, we begin to enjoy relief and peace through the presence of God: *“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”* Acts 3:19. Through repentance we also die to the old life of sin and move on to live with joy for God. Let’s read Romans 6.6.

LESSON 31

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED: PART 2

What are the three steps necessary to achieve soul salvation?

INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson, we began answering this question, studying the conversion of the jailer of Philippi, Cornelius and some disciples of John the Baptist that Paul found in Ephesus. Based on these stories, we said that God has established three basic requirements for us to achieve salvation:

- (1) Repentance.
- (2) Water baptism.
- (3) The baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Of these three requirements or steps, we have already considered the first, and today we will study the other two.

THE BAPTISM IN WATER

The Bible speaks of water baptism as a burial of the old sinful life; he tells us that we are *"... buried with him [Christ] in baptism"* Colossians 2:12. The word "baptism" literally means "immersion" and for this reason the person has to be submerged in the waters, when baptized. *"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip,*

that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.” Acts 8:36-39.

When we are baptized, our sins are erased by the power of the Name of Jesus that is invoked in that act: *“I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.”* 1 John 2:12. However, and although there are several passages in the Bible that show that water baptism must be performed *“in the name of Jesus Christ”* — Acts 2:38; Acts 8:16; Acts 10:48; Acts 19:5; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:11-12; and others — many evangelical churches follow the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church to baptize people using the titles *“Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”*

In doing so, they stop invoking the name of Jesus on the baptized person and, consequently, disobey the biblical mandate to perform baptism in the only name in which there is salvation (Acts 4:12). That’s why you must be very careful! It is not enough to attend an evangelical church. You need to find out if the church you visit believes and practices true water baptism, which the Bible commands.

Before going to Heaven, Jesus commanded his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the descent of the Holy Spirit:

“And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me... But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Acts 1:4,8.

A few days later, when they were praying, the Holy Spirit came upon them: *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And*

suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." Acts 2:1-5. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13.

Those early Christians were totally transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The transformation initiated in our life by repentance and water baptism is evident through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. *"And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man."* 1 Samuel 10:6.

When we receive the Holy Spirit we rise from the spiritual death in which we lived by sin: *"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."* Ephesians 2:1; and we receive the true life by the Spirit: *"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."* Colossians 2:12.

Have you heard of the baptism or fullness of the Holy Spirit? It is about Jesus himself dwelling in us! Therefore, pray and ask God to fill you with His Spirit, to become a blessed, cheerful and full of peace person: *"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."* Romans 14:17. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* 2 Corinthians 5:17.

CONCLUSION

LESSON 32

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

Name a type of weapon you know.

INTRODUCTION

2 Corinthians 10:3-5: *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* NIV.

When you gave your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, you enlisted in His army and entered into spiritual battle with God’s enemies. It’s a fight to the end! This is why the Bible tells to fight “the good fight of faith” 1 Timothy 6:12.

GOD GIVES YOU THE VICTORY

Whether you realize it or not, you have already fought in some of those battles because they do not occur physically but mentally. It is in the mind that victories are won or losses are suffered. But God’s promise is that He “... will keep [put a military fortress or garrison around] your hearts and your thoughts on Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7.

To obtain victories, however, there are some things we must do. The first thing is to know our enemy and his weapons. The second is to take advantage of the weapons that Christ has provided us and learn to use them well. If we do these two things, at the end of this battle, we can shout with the apostle Paul: *“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* 1 Corinthians 15:57.

THE THREE ENEMIES OF THE CHRISTIAN

The Christian has three main enemies. The first is, of course, the devil. He is the bitter enemy of your soul. Since you have become a child of God, he is extremely angry with you and will use all his tricks to draw you back to him. Let's read 1 Peter 5:8. If you neglect your spiritual life, the devil will not hesitate to attack you to destroy you. Let's also read 1 John 5:19. As we can see, the evil one is the one who rules this world.

The second enemy is the world. But even when we live in the world, we have already been saved from it; we no longer belong to it. James 4:4 gives us a clear warning: *"Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"*

The third enemy, "the flesh," is the worst of our enemies because we carry it all the time with us. The flesh consists of the nature that we brought to the world, from our parents; who acquired it from their parents and so on until they reached Adam and Eve; who in turn acquired this evil nature when they sinned in the Garden of Eden.

Peter's first epistle tells us to refrain from *"the carnal desires that battle against the soul"* 2:11. Paul teaches in Romans 8:8 that *"... those who live according to the flesh cannot please God"* because *"...the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and that of the Spirit against the flesh; and they oppose each other, so that you do not do what you want."* Galatians 5:17.

Now that we have identified our three main enemies - the devil, the world, and the flesh - we will see how they conspire against us and how we can overcome them.

THE SUPREME WEAPON OF THE ENEMY

One of Satan's superior weapons is temptation. That is why he is called "the tempter" (Matthew 4.3; 1st Thessalonians 3.5). He frequently uses worldly attractions to tempt us. That was what he did with Jesus by taking him to a very high hill and showing him everything the world offered. Then he said, *"All this I will give you...if you will bow down and worship me."* Matthew 4:9. But Jesus resisted Satan and his temptations by responding to him with the Word of God, and the devil had to leave him.

How is it that Jesus could resist the temptations of the devil, but Christians often cannot? Do we not have the power to resist? Yes, we do have it! Jesus has given us in the Holy Spirit, all the power we need, and all the spiritual resources necessary to overcome temptations. Surely we can succeed. However, we must first understand that the reason we fail is because when Satan approaches us with his worldly temptations, we do not respond as Jesus did.

Let's read James 1:14. We would not really be tempted if we did not have a fallen nature that wants to sin. Satan could approach us all day with his worldly seductions, but if there were no sensual desire of the carnal nature within us to respond, there would simply be no temptation. But it exists and usually responds with what the Bible calls "desire," "greed," or "lust."

Let us now read verse 15. Here we have the mortal progression of the devil: from desire to sin and from sin to death. Temptation, in itself, is not a sin. Jesus Himself *"...was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin."* Hebrews 4:15. However, playing with temptation and giving in to it is a sin. God allows the devil to tempt us so we learn not to trust in the flesh - which will fail every time - and to begin to trust Him, seeking His presence to be strengthened, victorious, and able to help others who are tempted.

LESSON 33

THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER

What is armor and what is its purpose?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Ephesians 6:10-18. As we saw in the previous lesson, Jesus has not left us in this world to fight the devil and his temptations alone. God has given us everything it takes to succeed. His wonderful resources are provided to anyone who has truly been reborn through water and the Spirit. However, these resources do not work by themselves; we must take them and use them if we want to succeed in defeating our enemy.

THE ARMOR OF THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER

The Bible compares us to a soldier (2nd Timothy 2:4). Hence, Paul refers to the military armor used by Roman soldiers as an analogy or a visual of the Christian's spiritual armor.

We are far from being helpless or disabled against the devil because we have the weapons of God, both defensive and offensive, to defeat him. Paul gives a list of weapons for this war, which are *"powerful in God, for the destruction of strongholds"* 2 Corinthians 10:4. He also tells us: *"Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may stand firm against the devil's [methods, clever tricks]."* Ephesians 6:11.

This entire armor was placed upon us when we received the Holy Spirit, and it is vital for us to win the battle against the devil. If we put on the whole armor of God, we can certainly *"resist on the bad day ..."* v.13. This armor has six parts, or pieces: five are for our protection against all that the devil throws at us and the sixth allows us to attack and defeat him.

We are not given armor for our back because God never intended for us to turn around and run away. It is assumed that the Christian must never flee the fight against the world, the flesh or the devil. But instead confront and be *“strong in the Lord and his mighty power”* v.10. Let us read verses 13 to 17.

PART # 1: THE BELT

“Belted their loins with the truth.” The Christian soldier must love the truth, the pure doctrine of God. In other words, you must love the Word of God. This will give you the firmness that is represented here by “the loins”, also known as the waist.

PART # 2: THE HEART

The breastplate of justice is what covers the heart. Living correctly provides protection to the most vital organs of the soldier. Righteousness and justice must be in your heart so you can defeat the devil.

PART # 3: THE FOOTWEAR

Peter wrote: *“always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you,”* 1 Peter 3:15. The feet of the Christian soldier should always wear the shoes of preparation to share the good news of salvation - the Gospel of Jesus.

PART # 4: THE SHIELD

Then comes “the shield of faith,” with which we can extinguish all the darts of fire of the evil one (v. 16). A shield attached to the soldier’s arm or held with his left hand, can be moved quickly to protect any part of the body that is attacked. Satan throws his burning arrows, but the shield of faith extinguishes them. This is the faith that conquers the world (1 John 5:4).

PART # 5: THE HELMET

The last of the defensive pieces of God's armament is the helmet of salvation. The helmet provides head protection. If God's salvation does not cover your mind and your thoughts, you have not yet put on this vital piece of a soldier's weapons, and your head is exposed.

In 2 Corinthians 10:4, after stating that the weapons of our war are powerful in God to bring down Satan's strongholds, Paul indicates that the evil thoughts of our human minds are some of those strongholds that God will enable us to tear down using the armor and other weapons that God has given us: *"casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"* 2 Corinthians 10:5. This can only be achieved when the helmet of salvation placed on the head correctly.

PART # 6: THE SWORD

The wonderful pieces of weapon mentioned above are for our protection only, and we cannot attack Satan with them. However, we have also been given a powerful offensive weapon. With it we can reach the devil's own territory and defeat him decisively. We refer to the sword of the Spirit as the Word of God. We have already seen that the Word serves to give protection and firmness through the belt of truth; but now we are seeing that it also serves for aggressive combat.

Just as a trained soldier can use his sword to destroy his adversary, the son of God can use the Word of God to completely defeat the devil. Jesus accomplished glorious victory over Satan's three temptations; not by asking the devil to cease tempting him, but by using the sword of God's Word against him (Matthew 4:4,7,10). It was the Word of God that left Satan without opportunities. *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword"*

LESSON 34

A POWERFUL WEAPON

“Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint on his knees.” What do you think of that statement?

INTRODUCTION

Let’s read Jude verse 20. A praying Christian is a powerful Christian. Just as exercising builds strength and muscles for a vigorous man, prayer makes a Christian strong and powerful.

THE WEAPON OF PRAYER

The early church provides an outstanding demonstration of the power of prayer. In Acts 4 we read how the Apostles were threatened under the order, not to give more testimony, or speak or teach in the name of Jesus (v. 17–18). Surely Satan thought he was going to make them run!

But look at what they did. They gathered and informed the saints and the other apostles of what had happened. Verse 24 tells us that they raised their voices to God unanimously. In other words, everyone prayed loudly. This extraordinary prayer was recorded in verses 24 through 30. And what was the result of it? A glorious victory: *“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”* v. 31.

Courage, boldness, and faith replaced fear. They received powerful support of new power and stormed straight into the city. Let’s read verse 33. Later, the power they received through prayer caused miracles to happen (Acts 5:12), many souls to be saved (Acts 5:14), the sick to be healed (Acts 5:15), demons to be cast out (Acts 5:16), prison doors to be miraculously opened (Acts 5:17–23), people to acquire a supernatural boldness to bear witness (Acts 5:26–32), those

who had the strength to endure persecution (Acts 5:40–41) and those who received an increase in fervor or boldness to propagate the gospel (Acts 5:42). What a tremendous power the Christian's prayer has!

THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH

The armor God gives you, should you decide to use it, will enable you to be *"more than a conqueror through him who loved us."* Romans 8:37. Truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, and salvation protect us just as the pieces of armor protected the Roman soldier. The devil simply cannot penetrate that armor with his cunning deception or fiery darts. There is no need for you to be defeated nor to give in to temptation. No matter how strong that temptation may be, you will win if you wear God's armor.

While at school, at work, in a bad home environment, or among friends, always wear the armor of God. Never take it off. When you take the weapons that were provided with God's armor and prayer meetings, then you are ready to face the devil. Armed like this, a child of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, can be extremely strong. *"...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."* (Ephesians 6:10).

Look at how this war is fought, *"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty.*" (Zechariah 4:6). The only way we can defeat Satan is with His Holy Spirit! His will is that you be covered with all the armor of God and equipped with the spiritual weapons that will empower you to face the satanic forces and gain victory for the kingdom of God. We are soldiers in the army of the Lord and Jesus gives us authority, *"over all the power of the enemy"* Luke 10:19.

TRIUMPH IN YOURSELF

Before you win the battle against the devil, a triumph must occur in yourself. Learn to say, "no" to carnal desires. This is one of the main requirements to be a disciple of Jesus

(Matthew 16:24). Denying oneself is not easy, but God's weaponry is not left to a vain and carnal person who only concentrates on himself or herself.

When you have learned to say no to yourself, you can say no to the devil. We cannot give room to the devil even a little and conquer him at the same time. Ephesians 4:27 says: "*Neither give place to the devil.*" We cannot be careless in any way with him. The devil has to be resisted and can only be resisted when we have God's armor on.

Sometimes it may seem that the enemy's attacks are very strong, but "*...greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*" (1 John 4:4). It may also seem that a temptation is irresistible, but we have the promise of being able to overcome it. Let's read 1 Corinthians 10:13.

If the devil has brought you down with a blow of temptation, always remember that, if we confess our sins, Jesus "*is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all evil.*" 1 John 1:9. Quickly let God know your sin(s), ask Him to forgive you, and dedicate your life to Christ again and feel secure of His forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

James teaches that when you go into battle against satanic forces, you must first submit to God (James 4:7). Only then can you resist the devil and make him run away from you. There will be times when you fail God, but you never have to feel like a failure. Satan can occasionally win a battle, but confessing and sincerely abandoning your sins will win you the war. We can be cleansed from all sin through the blood of Jesus Christ (John 1.7) and walk triumphantly.

So, face the enemy with the power of the Holy Spirit, using the weapons of God's Word and prayer. Use faith and he, the enemy, will flee. Devote yourself to acquiring all parts

LESSON 35

IT WAS NOT ENOUGH

Have you heard Jesus' words that said: "You are missing one thing"?

Briefly share what you think of those words.

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30. In these writings, we find the story of a man who approached Jesus with an important question. He was rich. He might have been someone who owned a lot of real estate or big business. He was also a member of the ruling class of the Jews. And he was a man of religious piety.

However, religiousness, no matter how intense, is not enough to be a disciple of Jesus. It takes something else.

"I HAVE DONE ALL THOSE THINGS"

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, where he would face the Cross. The rich man took the initiative to approach the Master and, judging by the text, did so in an unusual way: he came running and knelt before Him. This man had a genuine concern; he wanted to know how to obtain eternal life. This gave rise to a dialogue between the two that allowed Jesus to reveal important truths about the Gospel and discipleship.

Jesus responded to the man by talking about the importance of keeping the commandments and made reference to Exodus 20:12-16 and Deuteronomy 5:16-20. An interesting detail to note is that the Master mentioned only the last commandments of the Ten Commandments; those that directly affect interpersonal relationships. In some ways,

the observance of these “visible” commandments, so to speak, would be good evidence of the observance of others, which are more intimate or spiritual in nature.

“Master, I have done all that since I was young,” was the man’s response. Based on the Bar Mitzvah, a celebration that involves the assumption of responsibility towards the commandments of the Law when a boy turns thirteen (twelve years old for girls), we conclude he was referring to be thirteen years old.

Mark mentions a very significant detail: “Jesus, looking at him, loved him”; and then he presented the challenge of following him as part of the process of being his disciple and selling everything he had and giving it to the poor so that he could have treasures in Heaven. That rich Jewish leader was confronted with the challenge of following Jesus and paying a high price to become His disciple.

TOO HIGH OF A PRICE?

Following the Master is expensive. A high price has to be paid and we have already seen how different people react when faced with this reality. There are those who pass this hard test and there are those who do not. Piety and religiosity, even the most committed, are not enough to become a disciple of the Master.

This man assessed his situation. Let’s try to put ourselves in his shoes during this process. He surely was sincere in asking Jesus what he should do to obtain eternal life. As the Master answered him, he had to calculate the implications of what he would earn and what he would lose. In his heart, the balance appeared negative and the Bible tells us that he left very sad and afflicted because the price to pay seemed too high.

Not only was he impacted by this encounter, but the disciples were as well. Seeing the reaction of the young rich man, Jesus told them “How hard it will be for the rich to enter the kingdom of God” which came as a big surprise to Jesus’ followers, for the following reason:

Among the Jews, the predominated idea was that riches were evidence of divine favor and a reward for the religiousness of the person (Job 1:10; 42:10; Psalm 128:1-2; Isaiah 3:10). In Israel, it was very rare that poverty was associated with virtue or religiousness. However, Jesus does not condemn wealth per se, nor does he claim that there is any virtue in poverty; he only states that giving up wealth, for a rich man, can prove to be a price too high to pay for eternal life.

WE ARE MISSING SOMETHING

This rich man is a clear example of the current aspiring Christian disciple. Like that man, it is likely that many of us are devoted people and genuinely interested in earning eternal life. Like him, we do everything that, according to our tradition, education and religious culture, is necessary to “earn” eternal life. However, it is very likely that all that, even if it is good, is not enough. Like that man, we were invited to follow Jesus and become his disciples; a process that lasts a lifetime; a process that goes far beyond the observance of certain rules, or the application of a certain moral.

Being a disciple of Jesus consists of a change in our way of thinking and our way of life. It includes and encompasses all aspects of our life, our worldview, our values, and our behaviors. It has the ultimate goal of Christ being formed in us. The process of being disciples is painful and implies adjustments in our lives; adjustments that lead us to have to pay certain prices such as things to leave, relationships to break, behaviors or customs to discard, motivations to rectify, etc.

LESSON 36

VALUE OR PRICE

What is the difference between the two words found in the title?

INTRODUCTION

In 2 Chronicles 25, a character is mentioned who, from a young age, occupied a very important position in the nation of Israel: Amaziah. Let's read verse 1, which tells us that Amaziah was called to reign Judah at the young age of twenty-five. Some people who are under thirty or even twenty years old do not believe that God can call them and use them in His work, but the opposite is true: God can and wants to use young people too. God wants to make kings and priests including them.

Even if you are only fifteen or sixteen years old, you can be a blessing as a leader to others. You can be the spiritual leader of your family, school, or work. Amaziah is a great example of what we are saying, among several others that we find in the Bible: Samuel, Jeremiah, Daniel, etc. God looks at young people in a special way; not for tomorrow, but for today.

DON'T WAIT FOR PERFECTION

Let's read verse 2 now. It tells us that Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, though not with a perfect heart. Amaziah was not perfect, but he was committed to things that were right, as many of us are. God always likes the right thing to be done. However, sometimes we postpone decisions or allow circumstances to stop us, because we are not perfect and expect perfection before taking action. God is calling us to be protagonists today.

You don't have to be perfect to do the right thing. You just have to stop, look at God and say, "Lord, here I am. I want to do the right thing. Make me a servant of yours. "

THEY HAD PRICE, BUT NOT VALUE

Verses 3 and 4 tell us that the problems began at the same moment they chose Amaziah king. A battle was taking place, so Amaziah had to make some urgent decisions and the first thing he did was to take a census of his people. Let's read verse 5. Amaziah appointed captains among the families of Judah and Benjamin. Then he searched for men for his army that were twenty years and older and found that there were three hundred thousand who were willing to go to battle.

They were willing, but not prepared, so Amaziah had to add a hundred thousand brave warriors from Israel, whom he hired for a lot of money. Let's read verse 6. The inexperienced king, who tried to do the right thing before God, hired mercenaries for war by spending three thousand three hundred kilos of silver from the national treasury. The one hundred thousand men he hired were very professional, but with very few principles; they were brave, but without values; They had a price, but no value.

In this hour, the church needs courageous servants, servants of values. In our friendship groups and Apostolic congregations we need to walk together, side by side, showing the rest of the World and people in general that we can be brave and have values. It is only in this way that we can really see our lives, families, and churches transformed. Then from there, go to where God wants us to go. There is no other way of doing things.

MOMENT TO ELECT

The men that Amaziah hired to win the battle were corrupt, but he didn't care about that, because he wanted a blunt war. He thought that the only important thing was the results,

just as the Renaissance political philosopher Machiavelli said: “The end justifies the means.” And what happened as a result of his thinking? A man of God approached him and spoke to him. Let’s read verses 7 and 8. The prophet told the king that everything he had invested, everything bought, everything done up to that moment, he had to leave; For if he continued on that path, God himself would ruin his plan.

What would you have done at that time? Before continuing with Amaziah, remember the story of the last lesson, when Jesus said to the young rich man: *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.”* Matthew 19:21. This man’s problem was not his riches, but how his riches had him captive. How do we know? Because before Jesus’ demand he went another way, sad.

What would you do if Jesus told you that, to follow him, everything you have invested so far you have to leave? There are many who live the experience of the rich young man, or that of King Amaziah. They seek victory as it gives rise. They ingratiate themselves with the boss if necessary; they buy foreign wills; buy consciences; they buy favors with others, etc. As we saw, the rich young man chose badly. But what will Amaziah do?

“THEN”

After hearing the prophet speak, Amaziah had to choose; and the first thing he does is ask the man of God: “What, then, will be made of the hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?” The man of God responds: “Jehovah can give you much more than this.” V. 9. Brother, sister, and friend, God keeps telling us that today:

“I can give you much more than you have now. Do not worry about money, but about principles. Worry about your heart and stop thinking about how to buy happiness, prosperity, or

success. Take care to do the right thing, because I can give you much more than what I am asking you to leave to please me. ”

Now let’s read verse 10. The word “then” in this verse is very important, as is the next verse. In the Bible, there are many verses containing “then” like these: Joshua 1:8; Mark 10:49-50; Acts 16:29, to name a few. The important thing now is that you understand what God is saying to you:

“Take interest in me, follow me, do my will. Take care of having values and principles and of being a blessing to others. Do not worry about circumstances, enemies, or injustices. Then I will raise you, prosper you, and make you win.” God is telling you that today may be your “then.” That today your life can take a new direction, the road to victory.

CONCLUSION

Let’s conclude the lesson by reading verses 11 and 12. As in this story, there is a time when we must “carry a boulder” over all the things that can cause our spiritual defeat and death, and destroy them there with that boulder. Christ is that boulder in which we must affirm our total confidence, just as Amaziah did, who heard the voice of God, trusted Him and made the right decision.

What decision will you make now? Do you have value, or do you have a price?

Notes

LESSON 37

TRUE ANOINTING OF CHANGE:

PART 1

What does the word 'anointing' mean to you?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read 2 Kings 9:1-3. The biblical passage contains very strange instructions. The prophet Elisha tells one of his disciples to go to the house of one Jehu and once there, he was to put Jehu in a room in the house, anoint him as the new king of Israel and then flee from the place.

But this is not the only strange thing about the passage. Later, we are told that Jehu is heading to Jezreel, where the kings of Judah and Israel were, and on three occasions people come to meet him and ask him: "Is there peace, Jehu?" Now let's read verses 18 to 24. When those two messengers ask Jehu "is there peace?," each one receives the same answer: "If you want peace, turn around and follow me." And both messengers leave with Jehu. Here we have an anointing that produces a complete turnaround.

FALSE ANOINTING

Let us pause the story and go to the beginning of this matter. The Bible tells us that, long before human beings were created, Lucifer was in Heaven. He was one of the most powerful angels. Ezekiel presents him as the "anointed cherub." But one day, Lucifer looked at God on his throne and said to a third of the angels: "Follow me, I am going to dethrone God; and if you follow me, I will be your God." Then, a third of the angels fell under the false anointing of Lucifer.

The Bible says that because of this, God cast Lucifer from Heaven. Luke tells us that with His finger, God took Lucifer out of Heaven; a free translation of this text says that for God, it was like taking a fly off the shoulder. Brother, sister, and friend, the devil has such a strong anointing, that he brought down a third of all the angels of Heaven. But it is an anointing that ceased to be good from the moment he sinned in his heart and it became a false anointing of change. With that false anointing, he made those angels turn from worship to God and followed him. But just as there is a false anointing of change, there is also a true anointing: that which comes from Heaven; The one the Lord gives us!

TRUE ANOINTING

The Bible tells us that God speaks to Elisha the prophet so that a servant of his can take a flask of oil. At that time, a flask was a bottle of approximately four liters. That servant was sent by God to a house, where a man named Jehu was sitting in a circle, surrounded by the captains of Israel. This is a portrait of leadership.

They are sitting in a circle, talking about how bad things are in the nation; of how the nation is going to hell with Jezebel. Jezebel's son was king of Israel. While they were still there in their religious circle: talking about the good times, talking about everything God used to do, talking about how God used to move in miracles; Suddenly, an unknown man enters the house, carrying a bottle of oil, and asks: "Who among you is Jehu?" Jehu stands up and leaves that circle and says: "I am Jehu." And the sent prophet tells him: "Come with me, get away from that religious circle, and enter an inner room; enter a private place with me."

Those men watch as Jehu enters a room with this mysterious man who had a large bottle of oil. Once inside, this man takes the oil and pours it on Jehu. More than four liters of oil. It was not an oiled finger on the forehead; Jehu

was soaked in oil! Then the man speaks: "Thus says the Lord. You have been anointed as the new king of Israel." Then Jehu turns and leaves the room, and now stands, drenched in oil, in front of the men in the religious circle who look at him in amazement and ask him: "What did that crazy man do to you in there?"

When you enter the inner chamber accompanied by that "mysterious man" who is the Holy Spirit of God, He pours his anointing oil on you. When you have that anointing, you don't have to tell anyone that you are anointed; You don't have to boast about your ministry. Everyone notices the difference; Everyone realizes that the anointing has visited you, that the anointing has come upon you, that the true anointing is in you.

The true anointing of change is now on Jehu, so he looks at the religious leaders and tells them: "That man has anointed me as the new king of Israel" and suddenly the true anointing of change also falls on them in that religious circle. Now, instead of cursing the darkness, instead of speaking like people who don't know the power of God; instead of talking about the days of revival that were left behind and how it is impossible for there to be a change in this city and how that the spirit of Jezebel seized the city; the Bible says that, with the anointing on them, they stand up, take off their clothes and make a throne with them, saying: "Jehu you are the new king; sit on the throne; take your place!"

LESSON 38

TRUE ANOINTING OF CHANGE: PART 2

Can you have peace at any cost? What do you think?

INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson, we shared the first part of the very exciting story of Jehu, who was anointed by God as king of Israel to free the nation from idolatry. God raised this man to produce a change, a total renewal in his people and a return to true worship to God. What does it take for such a change to occur today? The true anointing of God. How important it is to have anointed leaders in the church, as well as people willing to follow them and serve the Lord. Let us read 2 Kings 9:13,16–18.

THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING

Jehu stands up and says to his small squad of men: “Let’s conquer the city!” So everyone runs off and gets on their horse. They have nothing; only praise trumpets. But they have submitted to an anointed leader! They are ordinary people, with an extraordinary leader, who has an extraordinary anointing; and, although the nation is being controlled by Jezebel, they begin to ride with all fury towards the city.

The Bible says that Jehu and his men beat their horses hard. They ride to the city, and they say: “We will take this city for God!” Here is what dialogue might have sounded like with Jehu and someone with common sense in that time: “Hey you, conqueror, do you have an army?” “No, I don’t have an army.” “Ah, but you have money, right?” “No, I don’t have money either.” “I know, you have some contact

or connection in the palace.” “Haha, no connections.” “So how are you going to take the city? What do you have to take it?” “All I have is the true anointing of my God!”

It starts with anointing. It’s all you need. No matter how big and beautiful a church or ministry becomes, no one started out that way. It all starts with something small. It all starts with a man and a woman, in a secret prayer place, alone with God who pours the true anointing of change upon those who seek it.

CHANGE OF SIDE

We already read that the king’s watchtowers, seeing this band of men approaching quickly, ran towards the king, saying: “Oh, king, there is a group of people coming in this direction. They quickly approach! What should we do?” And King Joram tells them: “Send one of our servants to intercept them and ask if they come in peace.” A messenger goes out on his horse and intercepts Jehu and his people: “Do you come in peace?” He asks; But Jehu answers: “What do you know about peace? Turn around and follow me.”

And at that moment, the true anointing falls on this servant and he turns around and goes with Jehu’s army. This teaches us that there are many people who are in the wrong army, in the devil’s army. However, they are people who have the call of God in their lives; people who want to become powerful soldiers of the true king, Jesus Christ. All they need is to meet someone who has been in the secret prayer room; with an authentic anointing of God that brings the true anointing of change.

The king asks for the first messenger he sent, but the courtyard watchman informs him that the servant never returned. Then they send the second man who comes quickly to Jehu and asks him again: “Are you coming in peace?” And

Jehu tells the same thing: “Turn around and follow me. I’m going to show you what peace is.” And suddenly this second servant also encounters the anointing of God: he turns around and follows Jehu. Now he is a new soldier of the army of conquest!

The courtyard watchtower reaches the king and says: “Oh king, the second servant has not returned either.” The king could have continued with that of sending people; he could have sent lieutenants, captains and all kinds of soldiers; but he realizes something and decides to go himself. Joram thinks: “I will have to do it myself. Now I will go face to face with this man and I will change him with my false anointing of change. I will meet him and change the dream and vision that this man brings to this city. I will frighten him and influence him to change his way of thinking; I will make him abandon the idea of conquering this city.” And Joram goes out to meet Jehu face to face.

IF THERE IS SIN, THERE IS NO PEACE

When you are close to impacting a city or region with an anointed ministry; when a breakthrough is near, the fight is no longer against the “soldiers,” demons, of low rank; it is not even against the mid-range ranking “soldiers”. Now the fight is against principalities and powers of darkness that come with a false anointing to try to make us change our mind.

That king goes out in his chariot and what does he see? He sees a few people, no weapons, no chariots; with only a few trumpets of praise. And in their midst, a man soaked in oil, which looks like a complete disaster. King Joram tells him: “Jehu, are you coming in peace?” And Jehu replies: “There will never be peace while your harlot mother is sitting on that throne, making sorceries.” And at that instance, the true anointing of change also falls upon this evil king. Tremendous!

LESSON 39

TRUE ANOINTING OF CHANGE:

PART 3

What do you think of this passage: *“Let them turn to you, but you don’t turn to them”*? Jeremiah 15:19 NASB.

INTRODUCTION

In the last two lessons, we saw how an Israelite named Jehu was chosen, anointed, and sent by God to free the nation of Israel from idolatry. We also saw how Jehu marched to conquer the city of Jezreel with just a handful of men. Finally, we saw how he mortally wounded King Joram of Israel, who had gone out to negotiate with him. Later, Jehu also killed Ahaziah, king of Judah and ally of Joram.

ATTACKS OF IMMORALITY

Jehu and those who played trumpets entered the city; they killed all the prophets of Jezebel; they shot down every idol; they opened the house of the Lord; they instituted praise again, and the whole nation fell to their knees. The revival has arrived! But since the enemy does not give up so easily, the Bible tells us that Jezebel then put make-up on, got ready, looked out the window and called Jehu trying to seduce him. Let’s read 2 Kings 9:30.

The devil realizes that he must stop you, otherwise, the true anointing that you bring will transform lives, families, and cities. He knows very well that he must make you change your mind, but he realizes he can’t. He then makes his last effort: since he has not been able to catch you in any other way, he attacks with immorality. It comes against you through sexual temptation; he comes to make you addicted to pornography; he comes to get you involved in adultery and fornication.

But this generation cannot fall before the false anointing of the spirit of Jezebel. This Apostolic generation has the true anointing of change. It has something much more valuable than what is in a club, drugs, social networks, movie theaters, or any immoral relationship. This generation has promises from God and a very great purpose that God wants to fulfill throughout the world!

REMAIN PURE

Jezebel is up there, trying to stop you, seeking to seduce you through her false anointing, but you don't have to pay attention to her. Remember today and always that the anointing you have is stronger, greater, and more powerful than any false anointing of any spirit of this age. When Jehu hears Jezebel calling, he does not answer but asks: "Who is on my side? Who?" verse 32. And the Bible says there were two eunuchs. A eunuch is someone who is sterile. The king didn't want to worry about the servants doing something with the queen, so he made them eunuchs.

Dear brother, sister, and friend, with all due respect, we want to tell you that if you are playing with the spirit of Jezebel, which is the spirit of immorality, it will make you sterile, spiritually speaking. You won't be able to reproduce anymore. Jezebel has been taking the true anointing away from many in this generation; that is, the ability to produce life or transform others into new creatures. But you remain pure, stay clean, take care of your walk, and fight your battle every day. Anoint your eyes, ears, and heart with true anointing.

ANOINTING THAT RELEASES

When Jehu asks, "Who is on my side? Who?" Suddenly the true anointing that is upon him falls on the eunuchs that were above; and eunuchs who had never done anything productive in their lives, lift Jezebel and throw her out the window. Jezebel crashes and is devoured by dogs, just as the

prophet Elijah had announced years before. We can imagine the eunuchs running away and rejoicing saying: We are free!

There is a true anointing of change for every slave, for every drug addict, for every drunk, for every adulterer, for every person tied to sexual immorality. There is a true anointing of change for you who are sick or anyone you know that is sick. God can change everything. He can change your heart, He can change your marriage, He can change your children, He can change any situation in your life. Amen.

CONCLUSION

We can do great things for our people! The apostle John wrote that we have “the anointing of the Saint” and that we know “all things” (1 John 2:20). The people around us cry out for it, perhaps without knowing it and expect us to get up as soon as possible with that true anointing of the Spirit of God, to preach the Word that brings freedom to people’s lives.

The spirit of Jezebel and her false prophets do not have enough power to change us, but we do have the power to change them. What do we need to make that happen? Be filled with the true anointing of change! God wants to renew our lives in these final days. He wants to renew our friendship group. He wants to renew our congregation.

God really wants to pour out the powerful anointing of his Holy Spirit on each of his children. Who wants to receive it? Do you want to receive it? This is your chance.

LESSON 40

CONTINUE BREATHING:

PART 1

What impression or sensation do snakes give you?

INTRODUCTION

Acts 16:16 (NKJV): *"Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling."*

Let's go now to an older version, the DRA version, in which this same verse reads: "And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain girl, having a pythonical spirit, met us, who brought to her masters much gain by divining."

In this lesson and the next, we will talk about the spirit of Python. In southern Colombia, it is quite common to encounter this type of snake, which has a special feature that we want to emphasize today.

THE SPIRIT OF PYTHON

In the book of Acts, several occasions are recorded when demons were cast out, but the names of the demons are never mentioned. Except here, in Acts 16, where the spirit that he casts out is identified. In the NKJV Bible, the spirit is described as "divination", however, in the older versions of the Bible, like the one we read earlier, the evil spirit that Paul cast from that girl is called "python."

WHAT THE PYTHON DOES

In the Bible, snakes represent evil spirits. We know that in the beginning of mankind, Satan entered the garden of Eden and got into the body of a snake to deceive the first

human couple. We also know that Christ, to counteract what happened in Eden, has given His church authority to tread - or trample - "snakes and scorpions."

What was the Lord talking about? Certainly not literally animals; but diabolic spirits that oppose humans and especially oppose the God's Church.

The python is different from the other snakes. The python snake does not kill its victims with poison; it doesn't kill with a bite. What the python does is wait for the right moment to attack its prey, usually while it's sleeping, then wraps around it and begins to squeeze and squeeze.

The python begins to literally squeeze the life out of its victim; and when its prey begins to fight to try to escape, it is already too late. It could try to breathe, but every time it exhales, the python snake squeezes more; until the victim dies and is eaten by the snake. Well, the python spirit works just like the natural python snake.

WHAT THE ENEMY WANTS

The python spirit is after only one thing: your breath; your breath of spiritual life, which according to the Bible is given by the Holy Spirit. In John 20 we read that Jesus breathed on his disciples, and they received the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers who were in the Upper Room, it came as a strong wind which filled the house where they were gathered.

The python spirit is after your air; he wants to catch your breath, he wants to choke your spiritual life. The python does not break his victim's bones like the constrictor boa. The devil really doesn't care how structured we are; he doesn't care how religious we look on the outside. The only thing that bothers and haunts him is the breath of God in us.

He wants to take out our anointing. He wants to completely eliminate the anointing in our preaching and our praise.

When the python spirit wants to take control of someone, it entangled itself around them; and when that happens, they can't praise God. He wraps around them in such a way that they no longer feel the freedom like before. They cannot raise their hands freely and praise God, and they cannot raise your voice in praise, because Python is taking the life, the spirit, the air.

UNEMPLOYED ANGELS

Python is a spirit that does not want the church to pray. The enemy knows well that a church that does not pray is easily defeated.

Do you know, brother, that one of the greatest tragedies is our lack of prayer? The unemployment of the angels. Jesus prayed in the garden and an angel came. Paul prayed on a ship and an angel came. Peter prayed in a prison and an angel came. When you and I pray, God releases the power of the angels; hallelujah.

Satan knows that the angels that are with us are twice as many as those with him. That is why the python tries to completely drown our prayer; to suffocate it until it completely dies in the church. Sometimes it's natural things, problems or incidents, that stop you in your prayer; but the spirit of python is not natural at all.

This spirit wants to keep you from prayer, because when you stop praying, you leave the angels standing in the line of unemployment. Jacob saw a ladder going to Heaven and in it, angels going up and angels coming down. Brother, sister, when you pray to God, angels ascend to Heaven with your praises and requests; and angels come down with God's answers.

LESSON 41

CONTINUE BREATHING: PART 2

Psalms 150:6: *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”* What do you think about this verse?

INTRODUCTION

In the last lesson, we talked about the spirit of Python and read the Acts 16:16 in an ancient version, which says: *“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain girl, having a pythonical spirit, met us, who brought to her masters much gain by divining”*

A little later, in verses 25 and 26, it says: *“And at midnight, Paul and Silas praying, praised God. And they that were in prison, heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and the bands of all were loosed.”*

DON'T STOP TRYING

Python is a spirit that wants to stop you. You can go a certain distance with python entangled around you, but you can't break free, and in the end you fall. The friendship group, the church, the mission, etc. get up to a certain level of growth, but then Python appears and says: *“You will not grow anymore. You will not reach the next mark. You will not see an increase or revival. There will not be any baptisms.”*

Whenever a Christian cell or congregation begins to grow, the python spirit arrives and begins to strangle; to choke the passion of the group leader; to choke the life of the Pastor, to choke his marriage, his ministry, his vision; to choke the hope of the leaders who follow that leader or that

Pastor. Python is always trying to stop you and make you give up; to stop trying to do great things for God. You must continue breathing.

Python attacked Paul when he entered Europe. The Bible says that when the owners of that girl possessed by the spirit of Python saw that Paul had expelled the demon of divination, and that the ex-fortune teller would no longer give them profit, they became angry and had Paul and Silas arrested.

UNITED WE CAN OVERCOME

Brother, when the church begins to make gains in the spiritual area, in the area of evangelization and in the area of finance, Python arrives. He loves when you are poor, he wants you dry, he wants you dead; because a living Christian, a Christian who serves the Kingdom of God, is blessed. And that is the most dangerous thing there can be for the devil.

But the devil was wrong; and don't think that his mistake was to have Paul and Silas arrested. Nor was he wrong when he had them whipped. His mistake was to put Paul and Silas in the same cell; because the Bible says that when there are two or more believers gathered in the name of Jesus, there He is. Brothers, if we do not join; if we try to serve the Lord separated from others, nothing can be done. Instead united, we can achieve everything!

Paul and Silas worshipped God together in prison. It does not say that they were competing to see which one sang best, nor does it say that they sang to fill the service schedule in the church. They sang with their hearts to their Lord, grateful to Him who considered them worthy to suffer because of His Gospel. And the Bible says that at midnight they sang hymns to God, and the other prisoners heard them.

IF WE PRAISE, THERE IS LIBERATION

Brother, when we praise God, people are freed from oppression, prisoners are freed from slavery, and those who are chained to sin listen to praise and are reached by the power of God, because praise to God is powerful.

Acts 16:26 says "suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and the bands of all were loosed."

There were only two who were praising God in that dark place; no one else, but it was more than enough. When Paul and Silas worshipped, not only did the prison doors open, but the chains of all the prisoners fell too. They were free!

This is something Python hates a lot. When you and I start worshiping God; when you and I breathe, and not just outside or physically. When you are in the presence of the Lord, it is not enough to listen to the message of the Word and raise your voice a little giving glory to God. What you need is to breathe again. What you need is the anointing of God, the breath of God, the Spirit of God, to fill you again. As long as you lift up your praise and your worship to God, your family can be made free, your neighbors can be made free, the city can be free. Our praise makes prisoners free!

Paul and Silas had rid themselves of a python that day and the Bible says that while they were singing to God, the prison doors opened. When you free yourself from python, the doors open.

LESSON 42

HOW CAN YOU SLEEP:

PART 1

Have you ever experienced being “half-awake” that is, wanting to wake up, but unable to get up at all?

INTRODUCTION

Let’s read Jonah 1:1–4. The world is in the middle of a crisis. The great powers see how the bastions that sustained their vain hope are destroyed before them. Capitalism, socialism, communism, nationalism, militarism; are all doctrines that have failed. Neither democracy as a system, nor religious extremism, are capable of containing the escalation of global violence that is taking place. The long-awaited peace seems to rely on sugar pillars: it has not been achieved, and it will never be achieved as long as man continues trying to govern this world on his own.

WHERE IS THE CHURCH?

Human beings are lost, and we know it, but where is the Church? Where has God’s instrument, vessel, for a world in crisis been hidden? It seems that the crisis is not only in the nations of the world. The lack of credibility in governments and secular institutions along with their leaders are part of the crisis and we now, have to add the lack of response of believers in Christ as part of the crisis. We can continue to blame each other, criticizing our leaders, looking for the speck in the eye of others and not seeing the beam in our own eye but we will never answer the questions people are asking us if we continue in this way.

HOW CAN WE SLEEP?

The book of Jonah gives us an account that reproduces a situation similar to the one that afflicts us today. The first chapter of the book seems to ask us a question; It is not verbalized, but it is perceived as the crisis progresses: Where are God's messengers? What is occupying His servants when they should be responding to the crucial and urgent needs of people without God?

The scene presented in verses 1:5–6 is alarming. Let's look at these verses. The sailors and passengers of that ship are in the middle of a terrible storm. Men, women, and children alike throw things overboard. First, they throw things that aren't important, then the important, and finally the essential; But no effort seems to help in the situation. It is such a desperate situation, that each one begins to cry out to his god for answers.

Everyone is disoriented. Suddenly they discover something unexpected: Jonah is at the bottom of the ship sleeping peacefully! The ship's captain question captures everyone's disappointment, bewilderment, and outrage: "How can you be sleeping?" verse 6.

It seems that the captain of the ship personified the Lord himself, asking Jonah at the time and the Church now: "How can you sleep when there are thousands who die? How can you sleep when my judgment looms over those who disobey me? How can you sleep in the midst of this chaos, when it is you who has the answer to the catastrophic situation?"

That captain should come alive today and ask the Church throughout the world: "How can you be sleeping while at church, singing, enjoying fellowship and not even having compassion for those who suffer outside?" Even the world asks: "How can the Church sleep?"

Like Jonah, we have fallen into our own trap. We are captivated by the spirit of the world, that loves results and success. Evangelizing efficiency, numerical growth, and administrative effectiveness are now all that seems to matter. We have a beautiful ship! But one that takes in water. It is not understood that, if the ship begins to sink, everything else must be thrown overboard and focus on the only thing that really matters: lives. Meanwhile, we continue to take care of the ship, or rather, sleeping inside it.

GET UP AND CLAIM IT

Jonah's book is full of lessons for our life in particular, and for the Church in general. They are lessons to shake our laziness, to wake us from our sleep and make us begin to fulfill the role that the Church is called to fulfill at times like these.

If Mordecai was alive, he would surely tell us how he spoke to his niece Esther in the midst of the crisis unleashed by Haman's hatred of the Jews: "For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this" Esther 4:14.

In the midst of despair and seeing that nothing was working, the ship's captain tells Jonah to: "Get up and cry out to your God!" verse 6. It seems that, in the time of crisis, pagan people will return to their gods in the hope of being heard. But those of us who have the real possibility of being heard by the one and only almighty God, remain asleep. This is more than unfortunate! It is something that must change. Do you believe it?

Jonah himself would later declare, from the belly of the fish: "*In my anguish, I cried to the Lord, and he answered me.*" 2:2. Just like Jonah, we have access to God's throne to intercede for those who are in the midst of the crisis. Jonah

LESSON 43

HOW CAN YOU SLEEP:

PART 2

What is a 'revival'?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Jonah 2:1-4. In the previous lesson, we said that Jonah is a Biblical book full of spiritual lessons for our lives. We also compared the crisis unleashed on the ship where the disobedient prophet was traveling with the crisis in the current world. We said that the Church is the one who has the answer to the very difficult current situation; but we also had to recognize that, unfortunately, we have fallen into a spiritual sleep and are not responding adequately to the call of the thousands who live and die without God. Finally, we learned of the urgent need to shake our laziness, wake up from sleep, and cry out to the Lord with all sincerity for those who are lost.

REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION

Our prayer for the current crisis must be accompanied, not only by sincerity or remorse but also by repentance and conversion. Jonah learned this in the belly of the fish. The king of Nineveh would learn this from him when he heard Jonah's preaching. Both Jonah and the king evaluated the crisis they were going through and determined that it was the result of their misconduct and their sin. The order given later in the decree of the king was blunt: *"Let each one turn from his evil path and his violent deeds."* (3:8).

God demands a thorough evaluation of our actions as people, as families, and as churches. We must grieve, cry out to God and, above all, turn away from our bad path, as 2 Chronicles 7:14 says. The prayer that God hears is that of the believer who commits to change.

Times of abundance, prosperity, and success drag us to spiritual carelessness, apathy, indifference to the poor, consumerism, waste and the satisfaction of innumerable selfish desires (James 5:4–6). Just as the “ethics” of the world, which changed the definition of what is bad or good before God depending on whether or not it produces a profit, we too have changed our values.

We must repent of this evil procedure, which God judges and punishes. We must convert to God with all our heart and return to our principles. The laws of sustaining the orphan and the widow and helping the needy, which the early church obeyed (Acts 4:34; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17–22) are still for us to obey.

May God free us from becoming like so many “Christian” movements today, who use prosperity as a measure of spirituality and misrepresent the doctrines of Christian stewardship in order to abuse the good faith of believers. If any of us does this, he or she must repent and convert to the Lord, for only then will He listen to his or her prayers.

CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE

“What have you done?” (1:10). Desperate because they were suffering the consequences of someone else’s wrongdoing, the sailors listen to the story of Jonah and his deliberate action to flee from God, and they encourage him to repent. Seeing a situation from God’s perspective significantly changes the perception for those in crisis. Jonah, meanwhile, is finally thrown into the sea by sailors (verse 14–15) and finds himself in the belly of the great fish that has swallowed him.

Jonah now cries out to God for forgiveness, reflects on his situation, assumes the consequences of his sin, changes position, and waits for God’s mercy (2:7–9). Meanwhile, the sailors end up turning their faces to the true God, and now fear His justice and power (verse 16). Crisis produces change;

necessary and urgent changes that might not have occurred otherwise.

In the fish's belly, Jonah concludes his prayer by saying: *"I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." 'So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.'* Jonah 2:9–10. What do we learn here? That personal examination, reflection of the situation from God's perspective, and repentance are necessary for our prayer to reach the Lord. Jonah's problem so far had been perspective; He was focused solely on himself and could not accept what God demanded of him. Our egocentrism prevents us from seeing the world as God sees it!

THE MESSAGE FROM JONAH

God speaks to Jonah a second time: "Arise, go and preach!" (3:2). No doubt Jonah is a new man after being three days in the fish. He leaves immediately in the direction of Nineveh and, upon arrival, begins to preach the message that God has given him. By reading chapter 3, we confirm that Jonah is the chosen one whom God has prepared for this task.

The Ninevites are confronted through the message of Jonah and moved to see the situation and the crisis from the perspective in which God sees it. They understand that what happens is not an accident of nature or influence of the stars. They understand that everything that is about to happen is because of their evil. They truly *"believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them."* (3:5).

The scene we see here is unheard of. It would be proper to expect such reaction and response from God's beloved people, but, what a surprise! This response arises from a people whose evil had filled God's patience and whose lives had been condemned to destruction. Wow!

LESSON 44

HOW CAN YOU SLEEP:

PART 3

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word 'compassion'?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Jonah 3:7–9. We arrive at the third and final part of our theme "How Can You Sleep," based on the brief but very intense story of the prophet Jonah.

PROCLAIMING GOD'S MESSAGE

Jonah shows us strategies that are relevant to those whom God has called to preach the Word of the Lord. One of the strategies is proclamation, not only in how he proclaims but, especially, in content. In less than forty days, the prophetic message reaches every person in Nineveh, challenging them to act accordingly. It even reaches the King himself.

Jonah's words are not those of an alarmist, someone who is considered to be exaggerating a danger nor of a mad saboteur, a person who engages in sabotage, who walks the streets frightening the Ninevites. As stated in the written testimony, the message reaches the king's throne with the same power, clarity, and authority with which was being heard at all four corners of Nineveh.

Jonah articulates God's demand with such clarity, that the king gets off his throne, sits on the ground, rips his royal clothes, and throws ashes on his head; and all this was done publically in front of his subjects. There is an individual response from all the people; one by one they fast and lament.

But Nineveh's evil demanded an official response and this is what we see in the royal decree (3:7–9). Upon knowing the decree, the entire people enter into a cry of repentance and remorse before God, with only one hope: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" verse 9.

GOD'S COMPASSION

The reason why the Church exists as God's people in this world in crisis is to be the answer the world needs. The Church is not called to give political, economic, philosophical, or moralistic answers. Many today share their thoughts, presenting these types of ideas. The only answer that the Church can give answers to its (the church's) nature, which is spiritual and rooted in a loving and merciful God.

The message we must articulate must also be clear and forceful in the sense that God is sovereign over everything (1:9); that He is just and his judgment is real and true on those who abandon their love (2:8); that He is compassionate and comes to use mercy, but only with those who sincerely turn from their evil ways (3:8); and that whenever such a thing happens, He ends the story with the question he asked Jonah: "*How should I not pity them?*" (4:11).

THE DANGER EGO

"*Are you right to be so enraged?*" (4:4) God asks Jonah. The question anticipates the last lesson this book contains. Here we see that, as servants of the Lord called to a special task, we always run the risk of falling victim to our own ego. The worst enemy of God's servant is himself!

Focusing on ourselves leads us to lose objectivity. It leads us to judge the actions of others more strictly than our own. This is certainly an inconsistency. Jonah demonstrates

inconsistency when he prays. In his book, he prays twice: the first, to ask God for compassion for him (2:1); the second, to reproach God's compassion for others (4:2).

Our egocentrism prevents us from being consistent with the message of the Gospel, which is of the good news of grace, mercy, and salvation. It makes us unable to see how small we are compared to God, and it shows how little we really know.

Jonah's defiant attitude manifests all this when he goes out and camps east of the city. There is a bower, a leafy shelter, and sits under the shade, to see what will happen to the city (4:5). Focusing on ourselves leads us to lose compassion, and immobilizes us in our mission to reflect God's love for the lost.

But God is not done with his servant, or with us, and teaches him that, because he is very worried about himself, he has lost the ability to sympathize with those of Nineveh. It is not that Jonah has no compassion, for he feels it even for his bush. The problem is that his compassion focuses only on what benefits him; in this case, shade. That is like us so many times. We pray, yes, but with a selfish motivation. The prayer that God hears must be accompanied by deliberate action to refuse to satisfy our selfish desires.

The book of Jonah ends with the following words of the Lord: *"You [Jonah] have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which [c]ame up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"* (4:10–11).

LESSON 45

LET US HARVEST THE SOULS:

PART 1

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word 'mission'?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Psalm 126:5-6. Many times, sowing the seed is not an easy task; but if we want to collect the bunches or sheaves, we have to go out to the field and sow it. God teaches us that if we sow the Word of God in the hearts of men, it will grow. Now let's reread verse 6. Here we find the law of God's harvest, irrevocable and absolute; It never fails. The law of the harvest in Psalm 126 is divided into three steps: **(1) Go forward, (2) Cry and (3) Sow the seed.**

GO FORWARD

This step includes the desire to win others to Jesus Christ. If such desire is fervent, it will motivate the believer to make a special evangelizing effort, focused on the salvation of the lost. It will make them leave the comfort of home to reach sinners, wherever they are. They will not come to you, you must go to them!

CRYING

Crying means more than just shedding tears. The "twin brothers" known as "fasting" and "prayer" are the main motivators of the burden for the lost. This kind of emotional participation brings agony and crying over a lost child, or a city.

In 1 Samuel 1 the beautiful story of Hannah is told; who was crying because "Jehovah had closed her womb." No loving care given by her husband, Elkanah, could alleviate

the agony of her unsatisfied desire. She “with bitterness of soul, prayed to Jehovah and wept abundantly and vowed.” Her burden became so heavy that she promised a sacrifice to God if He allowed her to have a child. God gave her a son named Samuel, who would be a salvation for Israel in his time.

Rachel also cried saying, *“Give me children, or else I die.”* Genesis 30:1. God remembered her, listened to her and opened her womb. The first child born to her was neither more, nor less than Joseph, who was to save the family during the shortage.

The desire to win the lost - friends, relatives or others - will produce tears and sacrifices. These are essential elements in the true production of a fruitful harvest. There can be no effective harvest without watering the work with tears. Unfulfilled hopes bring only frustrations. When the results do not arrive, the heart becomes sick with regret. God does nothing unless we fast and pray. Crying is essential for the final results, but we still have one more step to comply with *“the law of God’s harvest.”*

SEED THE SEED

If a crop is to be obtained, steps such as preparing the land, sowing the seed, and waiting should be taken. No farmer sows the seed in unprepared land; preparing the field gives the land better quality. The sinner’s heart must become sensitive. The attitude of sacrifice and love from a child of God can soften the hardest hearts. The sinner has to feel this kind of love from the believer.

The lost cannot be saved with words alone. When the spirit of the one to be converted becomes tender, the Word of God is welcomed with pleasure. The Word (seed) begins to grow in them and a new life begins.

Frequently, small changes begin to occur before a complete surrender. How exciting it is to observe a miracle happening before your eyes! *"first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head."* Mark 4:28.

There is no harvest without sowing seed. For a sinner to be truly born again, he has to have the Spirit and the Word planted in his heart. *"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it ..."* Matthew 13:23.

A completed barn by harvest time indicates that someone has mixed faith with works and succeeded. We have tried to make God "an errand boy." We have asked Him to do what He has delegated to us; We have asked him to win souls, when He has sent us to sow the seed.

A work that is not sown with good grain, will only produce weeds and will never produce a crop. A watered field without seed is only a muddy field. Should we keep waiting to sow the seed? Do not! When a farmer wants to harvest his crop, he does not invite it to enter his cellar, he goes out and brings it. Winning souls is the same. If we want lost souls to be saved we have to put the good seed of the Word in their hearts. moving forward!

THE SEED IS LIFE

The seed, with the germ of life in it, will grow when it is planted and cultivated properly. The seed - the Word - is full of life. Jesus said: *"The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."* John 6:63. And Hebrews 4:12 declares that *"the Word of God is alive and effective."*

There is power and life in the Word of God. In chapter 37, Ezekiel tells the story of the vision in which he was carried by the Spirit and placed in the middle of a valley full of dry bones. The Lord asked Ezekiel: *"Will these bones live?"* And

Ezekiel could only answer: *“Lord, you know it.”* The first message of the Word caused the bones to come together and be covered with flesh and skin. The second prophecy of the Word caused them to breathe and stand on their feet forming a huge army. There is power in the Word to create new life!

Let’s read Isaiah 55:11. The Word of God is infallible; It never fails. We have depended on and tried many things, but we have often failed to believe that God’s Word never returns empty. The teaching of the Word - sowing the seed - will result in a harvest of souls. The law of the spiritual harvest remains in force today.

CONCLUSION

Going forward, crying and planting the precious seed are the duties of every child of God. We want things to be easy. We thought that the newly converted would remain without any extra effort; But now is the time for every Christian to get involved in winning and maintaining souls. If we are to hear Jesus say “well done” then we have to do things well; We have to reach our world. We have been ordered to do that!

Let’s read 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and pray for God to help us fulfill our noble and important mission.

LESSON 46

LET US HARVEST THE SOULS: PART 2

What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word 'seed'?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Luke 8:5–8. If sowing the seed in a good field results in a good harvest, then it is of paramount importance that we identify the fertile field. A farmer will not sow his precious seed in a horse stable or in a place where the horse travels; The seed would be trampled and destroyed. The farmer leaves his place of comfort and goes to remote areas, in the countryside, where the seed can be sown and left to grow without being bothered.

THE KEY: THE HOMES

In the Bible "the field" has always been the world. This is also true in relation to evangelization. Since it is impossible for a man to reach everyone at once, he must begin to reach the individual. Where is the most effective place to sow the seed? What is the best place to reach a sinner with the Gospel? We find the answer to this important question from examples and commandments given throughout the ministry of Jesus Christ and his Apostles. They went to homes. Jesus and the disciples took the Word of God to the homes (Matthew 10:12; Luke 19:9; Acts 2:46; 5:42; 11:12; 16:32; 20:20).

The great revival in the Book of Acts began with the ministry of Jesus' disciples; and virtually all of that ministry was done in homes. The increase of new members in the church were a result of the enthusiastic revival taking place

in the homes. The early church of Jerusalem began in a home and from there has reached the world with the true Gospel.

In Acts 20:26 Paul says: *"I am innocent from the blood of all."* It was impossible that Paul could touch every individual personally. Why did he say *"of all"*? Because, in reality, he multiplied his life through his trained disciples. He made the time and place to train his converts to teach others: *"...commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."* (2 Timothy 2:2). This was the basic method of the early church and the best mode of multiplication to date: Evangelize, Teach, Train and Send. Much of this apostolic ministry began in homes, with small beginnings, great revivals were born.

A PROVEN METHOD

The most proven apostolic biblical method of winning souls is that of home Bible study, or the cell groups. New Christians can be produced through home gatherings. It is not difficult to do so; almost anyone can do it. You can transmit what new converts receive to others, through the teaching of the Word of God in a home.

The teaching of a Bible study at home is not to preach sermons, but to tell the beautiful truths of the Word of God as revealed in the Bible. Much of the Bible is written in the form of stories, which can be easily shared with those who attend the friendship group.

A friendship group leader does not need to be a Pastor or a graduate of Bible College; not even a long time Christian. Both those who have been saved many years ago and those who are new converts can effectively teach the Bible in a cell group, after a brief training.

When the right tools have been put in the hands of an active Christian, he now has a proven method of becoming

a successful soul winner. Winning souls then becomes an exciting reward, it becomes much more than a habit; it becomes an addiction. That is why he wins them - righteous souls never stop winning souls. They are not super-Christians, but normal Christians in the eyes of God, who want to share their new life of love with everyone.

TRAINING

It is very important to win lost; but it is equally important to make disciples and train new converts. A person who gains a soul should not feel that his responsibility towards that soul has ended with their conversion. A mature Christian, with proper understanding and training, can make a disciple of the new convert and establish him in faith so that he in turn becomes a soul winner.

It is for this purpose that we write these lessons, so that everyone who participates in them, with God's help, will guide at least one new believer per year to the salvation presented in Acts 2:38; and then watch become stable and productive disciples of the Lord Jesus.

GO!

It is God's will for his disciples to make other disciples. Jesus taught us this by example. The primary method of Christ to make disciples was to teach. He taught everywhere; in the market, in the temple, in the synagogue, in the home, on the hillside, and even on the coast. Let's read Acts 1:8. This command to testify includes the knowing Jesus, which will be transmitted to the lost through example and instruction by every believer. Let's read Matthew 28:18-20.

The Lord's commandment is: go and reach, preach, baptize and teach all nations. Through this plan to multiply disciples, teach and train them, the early church reached its generation. This has never been achieved since that time. This last generation presents a final challenge and

opportunity to familiarize the unconverted with the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

This gigantic task can be accomplished soon, if all church members become participants in the ministry of teaching His Word. You must decide what you are going to do with your life. You need to know where you want to go and what you want to achieve; and that will require you to set goals and new priorities.

QUESTIONS

What is the most important thing in your life? Because if soul winning is secondary or even lower on your list, then you don't have to ask yourself why you're not a soul winner. How much would you give of your life to win a soul? Would you give a year, and if so, after that year, would you give another to win another soul? Why did God save you? What does He want from you, more than anything else?

When God gathers all his jewels in his great kingdom, would you not want the Almighty to crown some souls that bear the traces of your hands? Wouldn't you like to find at that meeting bundles or sheaves that your hands touched here on earth? The answer to these questions is that you need to develop a passion for lost souls and enter the daily life of evangelism.

CONCLUSION

The fields are still white, but laborious hands must touch the harvest. Everyone must touch one. This is the will and plan of God: that all believers reproduce spiritually. This can be done by getting you involved in home friendship groups and classes for new converts. If you care and have an interest, you will participate.

Of the grace you have received, give grace!
(Matthew 10:8)

LESSON 47

LET'S HARVEST THE SOULS:

PART 3

Is there a lot or little time left for Jesus to return? Why do you believe that?

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Scriptures tell us that Jesus will return soon. The Apostles, Evangelists, Pastors, and Christians in general, of the early church proclaimed this promise. But why have so many years passed and Christ has not yet come? We are approaching the two thousand years of existence of the Church and the Lord still has not picked it up. Why has it taken so long?

In 2 Peter 3:8–9 we find the answer: *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward [a]us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”*

GIVE WHAT WE HAVE RECEIVED

Christ has not yet come because he does not want the condemnation of human beings. Let us think: if Christ had come twenty, thirty or forty years ago, many of us would have perished; but in his mercy, He waited and gave us the opportunity to receive it before the end.

Let us thank the Lord for that, and also for the people who preached the Word to us. Because they were arranged as tools in the hands of God, we are here today, enjoying grace, the unmerited favor of our God. It is very good that we rejoice in our salvation, but it is also necessary that we keep the lost in the mind and heart.

INCREASE OUR EFFORTS

We are sure it is the final hour of the Church, so it is our turn to give grace as we have received it.

Returning to the text of 2 Peter, the Word of God says that He *"is patient with us,"* that is, with the Church. We are clear that the task of bringing the lost to the feet of Christ is ours and only ours. But we should also have understanding that, in light of this and other Scriptures, it does not seem that God is very satisfied with the intensity with which we do our job.

How many moms have fought or fight with their daughter because she does not want to make her bed; or with the son who does not want to sit down to do schoolwork until it is too late? God fights with us for our procrastination; and procrastination is being disobedient.

We believe that the grace and patience of God will soon give way to His justice, and Christ will come to judge the Earth, but not before raising his Church. For this reason we must actively share the good news of salvation; testify of Jesus to friends, neighbors and family, while there is still time. We must accelerate our pace, increase our effort. How many here can feel what is in the heart of God right now? How many really know God?

WHITE FIELDS

Jesus taught his disciples to look at the crowds as sheep without a shepherd, to see people as lost beings. He said to them: *"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"* John 4:35. Jesus pointed their eyes at the spiritual fields, which were already white. The disciples thought they had plenty of time to share the good news, but Jesus showed them that the harvest of souls was at that moment. That is why He refers to them as "white fields."

When the wheat crop is ripe, it must be picked up immediately, otherwise it spoils. "They are already white for the harvest" does not mean anything other than: evangelize the lost right now! The harvest must be picked up urgently. Now is the day of salvation; now is when you must share the Word of Life.

"Raise your eyes and look." In Greek, the word "look" means "study with intensity." Jesus wants us to carefully study the miserable condition of the sinner next to us. Have you carefully observed those who live in your neighborhood? Have you looked closely at your co-workers, or your non-Christian relatives? How do you see the people who live around you? Do you see them with urgent needs? Do you see them hungry and thirsty for God? Do you see them as sheep without a shepherd?

JESUS IS CALLING US

Matthew 9:36–38 says that Jesus' heart was filled with compassion, he was moved to see the helpless and scattered multitudes *"like sheep without a shepherd."* But He did not try to win those lost souls; instead He commissioned His twelve disciples to that task. Jesus also asked his disciples to pray *"to the Lord of the harvest, to send workers to harvest."* The greatest need in *"the fields of the Lord"* is workers; and the solution to this tremendous need is to pray that the Lord sends more workers to the harvest field - the world.

Just like Christ, we cannot reap the harvest alone. We need the help of others. The cell strategy is based on harvesting through new workers, leaders, servers or hosts. Jesus Christ is looking for workers for the harvest. Will there be anyone here who is willing to answer the call? Who will say as Isaiah: *"Lord, here I am, send me."* Isaiah 6:8.

LESSON 48

BE LIKE CHRIST:

PART 1

Is there happiness outside of Jesus? What do you think?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Matthew 1:18-25. Today we are going to talk about a topic that some elude: Christmas. For most people, Christmas is a beautiful time of the year; time for family dinners, gifts, joy; a time to celebrate. For others instead, the Christmas season is synonymous with melancholy, nostalgia; because they miss a loved one with whom they would like to spend it with. And for others, it is a party that does not match our Christian faith.

THE REASON TO CELEBRATE

Christmas should not be seen only as a time to be with family or friends, because Christmas is much more than that; it is the celebration of Jesus' birth! Okay, this is not the exact date Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but who knows what that date is? So far there is no conclusive evidence that tells us when it is.

Christmas is a very important celebration. It is much more than lights, gifts, and food and drink. We are not saying that all that is bad in itself. The bad thing is to forget the true meaning of Christmas, which is to celebrate Jesus. Christmas means "birth," a term that refers to nothing less than the incarnation of God; God himself coming as a man; God manifested in the flesh.

We see no reason why we should not celebrate Christmas, and many reasons to do so; as long as we do it remembering the main thing: that Jesus was born on this Earth, and that

he did it to give us life, and life in abundance (John 10:10). In truth, Jesus is worthy of this celebration, and not only for what he did for us but more than anything else for who He is: Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23).

The celebration of Christmas must have Jesus as the reason for the season. Among other things, we should use this special time of the year to meditate on Him, about who He is, what He did for us, and how much we are like Him.

BE LIKE JESUS

You might ask yourself: "Why should I be like Jesus?" The most direct and biblical answer is: He asks for it. Jesus said: *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."* Matthew 11:29 KJV. So, being like Christ is our goal, and is also the key to rest or happiness in life. We cannot pretend to be Christians if we do not learn to be like Jesus. Let's now look at ten things in Jesus' life that will help us better understand this challenge and will motivate us to try harder each day.

1. Christ *"came to seek and save what was lost."* Luke 19:10; "He came ... to save sinners." 1 Timothy 1:15. He came to this world for you and me. He left everything for us.

2. Jesus chose to live his childhood and youth in Galilee, the poorest region of Israel at that time. For this reason, He suffered discrimination for being from Nazareth and the son of a carpenter. Let's read Matthew 13:55-57.

3. Jesus was the object of xenophobia, dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries, but he did not resent it. He did not discriminate. Jesus blessed the children, the sick, and all kinds of people; He even touched some dead, something completely prohibited by law. Let's read Luke 7:14-15.

4. Jesus was sociable and open. He attended weddings and funerals, ate with people of all levels, and he ate so explicitly, or publicly, that he was accused of being *"...a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners..."* Matthew 11:19. But He didn't care about any of that!

5. Jesus showed compassion. He worried about others. He was always attentive to children, the poor, women, foreigners, and even to the rich. Jesus was courteous, loving, cordial, gentle, meek (except with hypocrites).

6. Jesus maintained a servant attitude. He *"did not come to be served, but to serve."* Mark 10:45. Let's also read John 13:13-14,34.

7. Jesus practiced integrity, that is, what we are when nobody sees us. Jesus never lied, but was, and remains, trustworthy: *"...immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us"* Hebrews 6:18. He was, is, and will be *"full of grace and truth."* John 1:14.

8. Jesus had close friends, such as Peter, John, Mary, and Lazarus with whom he was totally transparent with about his life. There is no deception in him. On one occasion, speaking with his disciples, he confided: *"My soul is very sad, until death; stay here and watch."* Mark 14:34.

9. Jesus constantly prayed for his disciples, because he loved them: *"Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them [a]to the end."* John 13:1 NASB. The expression *"to the end"* means *"to the utmost."* Let's also read Luke 5:16; 6:12; and then study John chapter 17 at home.

LESSON 49

BE LIKE CHRIST:

PART 2

In the last lesson, we talked about how Christmas is a good time of the year to reflect on how much we are being like Jesus. What is your opinion on that thought?

INTRODUCTION

Philippians 2:3-5 KJV: *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,”*

Many believers claim to be disciples of Jesus but generate too much doubt about it. This is a sad phenomenon, but it is not new. In the Church, there have always been people who appear to be one thing but are really something else. People try to project a good image, but their deeds give them away because they are selfish, competitive, or boastful people.

Therefore, we need to remember the advice of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:3–4. Let’s read it again.

TRUE DISCIPLES

Few people yearn to have the same feeling, the way of being and thinking, of Jesus. But this feeling is one to be desired, sought, and acquired. It is acquired with humility and total surrender. Do you want to know if you are a true disciple of Jesus? The true Christian disciple has the following ten characteristics:

1. They recognize that it is God who has called them and assumes their responsibility for it. Therefore, their dependence on God is constant and is always growing as a Christian.

2. They are not dominated by emotion or sentiment, but the Lord's commandments and precepts are their guide (Psalm 119:105).

3. One who lives wisely, because they understand the lessons of the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of their future decisions.

4. Your actions and motivations are to help others. When someone suffers brokenness, hurt, and emotional pain, Jesus' true disciple works as the apostle Paul did (2 Corinthians 11:28-29): *"what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?"*

5. They have a pleasant personality. They show affection and have kindness. They recognize the gifts and talents of others. They tolerate imperfection.

6. Tolerate, as mention above, does not mean approval. People are only released by the truth; so the true disciple of Jesus is sincere, even in situations where the truth can bother others.

7. The true disciple of Christ is down to earth, even if he or she has a lot of capacity or preparation (secular/educational).

8. True disciples control their temper. They are not angry and exercise self-control.

9. True disciples know how to listen. Listening is not the same as hearing. Hearing does not merit any effort since it is an entirely natural process, which consists of capturing sound waves with one's ears. Instead, listening is a learned process that involves our whole self. Through it, we reflect the meek and humble character of the Lord Jesus Christ and express our commitment to the needy, paying attention and understanding their needs.

10. True disciples are committed to others. They never express themselves as Cain's insolence, rude and disrespectful behavior: *"Am I perhaps my brother's keeper?"* True Christian disciples do not "wash their hands," as to say they don't care for others. They get involved with others because they believe that people have intrinsic value. They desire and promote the personal, spiritual, and professional growth of everyone in the Church.

In short, true disciples of Jesus are the ones who resemble their Master in every way.

JESUS IS ON YOUR SIDE

You may be thinking: *"This is very difficult for me! Who can become like Jesus?"* But here we find precisely the reason why God chose to become like us: in order to face the same thing that you and I face; to go through the same kind of circumstances that you and I go through; and after that being able to understand and help each other, as He really does. The Lord joined us on earth and became flesh like us, to sanctify us: *"For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,"* Hebrews 2:11.

In Hebrews, we are also reminded that *"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of*

LESSON 50

LESSONS FROM THE DESERT:

PART 1

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word 'desert'?

Deuteronomy 1:2-3: "It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea. Now it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him as commandments to them,"

INTRODUCTION

The Atacama Desert, in northern Chile, is the driest nonpolar desert in the whole world. If you travel through it on the Pan-American Highway, you will not see a single green leaf, cactus, or even thorns; just sand and stones. There is no rain there, nor is there dew; everything is dry and inhospitable. Most of the people that live in small towns or the main city, called Antofagasta, never worry about fixing holes or cracks in the roof, because it hardly rains a few drops in a three to four year period. Why spend money on expensive roof repairs? However, lately, and against all odds, we have heard very atypical news of the Atacama Desert: heavy rains and floods have occurred in that place. No one in that region remembered seeing, even hearing anything like that before!

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DESERT

Who has not heard a Christian say that he feels like he or she is in the middle of a spiritual desert? What do we mean by that? When Israel left centuries of slavery in Egypt, it had to go through the vast desert of Sinai before reaching the Promised Land. They could have entered that Promised Land

a few days after their liberation from Egypt, but due to their rebellion and disbelief, they had to spend forty years in the desert.

It took four decades for the entire generation of adults that escaped slavery to die and for a new generation to take possession of the land God had promised Abraham. For four decades, the Israelites learned many lessons about God's character and purpose from their pilgrimage experience in the desert.

In reality, the character of God's people was forged in that desert. The rigors of life in the desert produced suffered, resilient, and patient people. Similarly with us, without any desert experiences in life, we could become comfortable, indifferent to others, and without the willingness to require much of us. That is why the Lord has to take us to the desert from time to time.

THE LORD'S CARE

The Lord who freed the Hebrews from the hands of their Egyptian masters was the same one who sustained them and protected them from hostile time and the dangers of the desert.

When God led his people through the desert in those times, he had a sovereign purpose. He wanted to teach them to trust and depend on Him alone. Let us pay attention to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 2:7, in reminding Israel of the care of the Lord: *"For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hand. He knows your trudging through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing."*

One of the first feelings one has when he or she finds themselves in the desert is the lack of resources. Loneliness envelops you like a mantle. But it is in solitude that we can

better hear the voice of God. The Lord uses the desert to sharpen our inner ear so that we can see his great faithfulness and sovereign purpose.

Decades after Israel's departure from Egypt, when the psalmist Asaph recalled God's benevolent purpose in the desert, he wrote the following in Psalm 78:52-53: *"But he brought his people out like a flock; he led them like sheep through the wilderness. He guided them safely, so they were unafraid; but the sea engulfed their enemies."*

THE WAY OF THE LORD

In Isaiah 40:3 we find a prophecy about John the Baptist's task: *"A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."*

The prophetic voice emerges from the desert and the way for the Lord is prepared in the desert. Obviously, the desert has an important meaning in the development of God's plan for our lives. He also had it in Jesus' ministry.

Matthew 4:1-2: *"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted[a] by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."* Thus, our Lord was not exempt from a desert experience. And Luke 4:14 states that Jesus emerged victorious from such an experience: *"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside."*

These two texts imply that God has a purpose to accomplish in us, that only takes place in the desert. If we only think of the arid, difficult, inhospitable nature of the desert, we will lose sight of something that God wants to forge in our character that will give solidity and firmness to our faith that will serve to base our trust in God in any situation.

LESSON 51

LESSONS FROM THE DESERT:

PART 2

What do you think of thirst?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Exodus 17:1-7. Israel left Egypt and went to Rephidim. This place is a valley that is exactly one day away from Mount Sinai, next to the entrance of the current Horeb district. It is a long and narrow gorge, with perpendicular rocks on both sides. The Sin Desert through which the Hebrews approached this valley is very sterile, and contains little or no water; you can barely even see any stunted bushes. The only shelter for the panting pilgrims is the shadow of the large protruding boulders.

ISRAEL TEMPTS GOD

In Rephidim, the people of Israel argued with Moses, saying, "Give us water to drink." This was the third test that Israel had faced within a few days. The first had been by the Red Sea, when they were cornered by Pharaoh and God opened the sea for them to pass to the other side. The second was when they were hungry and God gave them manna from heaven. Now the people were in Rephidim and thirsty. The lack of water was a very severe deprivation and meant great suffering for the Israelites; this is something we must understand.

Their behavior during this new difficulty was rampant and amounted to tempting God. They presented opposition to the minister of God, showing distrust in God's care and disbelief over his provision. We are not very different from the people of Israel in the desert. Here we have a typical description of our own stubbornness and lack of faith. Here

we find the “natural man” of whom the apostle Paul speaks.

The Hebrew people did not learn from God’s mercy when He fed them manna in the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16). God, in His mercy, had given them the best food, but they were still dissatisfied. This reveals the wicked heart of man. They were not happy with the miracles they had obtained from God, and now they are rebelling against the leader God has given them. They even question their intentions of taking them through the desert: “Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

GOD HAS MERCY

The problem was not what they asked for, but the way in which they did it. By asking for water in that manner, they also tested the patience of Moses, who cried out to Jehovah, saying, “What shall I do with this people?” Moses is taking the case to God, appealing to Jehovah. His question: “What shall I do with this people? Reflects the fatigue he feels after so many complaints from the people. Moses is asking God for justice!

Moses is asking permission from God to punish Israel. However, God is not angry with Israel, and so He gives Moses a strange order: “Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.”

So, instead of being angry, instead of discharging His wrath on a people who are rebellious and stubborn, God shows mercy and tells Moses to strike a rock. That is, instead of punishing Israel, Moses punishes a rock. What I am about to share is the most impacting part of this lesson. God says

to Moses: "I will stand before you there on the rock." God was going to stand on the rock that Moses was going to strike. God was taking the place of His people, on the rock. The Lord would receive the punishment that was for the people of Israel!

Moses, then, takes his stick and hits the rock, and from it living water came out that gave the people of Israel something to drink. Wasn't this what Christ did for us? Wasn't He on the Cross instead of us to be punished for our sins? Didn't Christ die in our place? Let's read Isaiah 53:4-6. Just as God was on the rock instead of Israel to receive the punishment that the people deserved for their rebellion, Christ was on the Cross replacing man, to carry their sin and receive the punishment they deserved. This is the beautiful story of redemption, which is clear in both the Old and New Testaments. This is the substitute atonement of Christ for us on the Cross. Let's read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4.

The desert brings a wonderful lesson for the Church: that from our Lord Jesus Christ, and from his side pierced there on the Cross, blood and water sprouted (John 19:34). Living water still sprouts forth from our Lord Jesus. Jesus still invites us: *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* John 7:37-38.

JUST ONE TIME

At this point, perhaps some of you are wondering about a similar passage, in Numbers 20. Where Moses hits another rock, from which water also sprouted. Let's read Numbers 20:1-13. This time Moses disobeys God's order and is punished by not being able to enter the promised land.

What had been God's order to Moses in this other occasion? "You and Aaron [...] speak to the rock [...] and it

LESSON 52

LESSONS FROM THE DESERT:

PART 3

Trust. What do you think of this action?

INTRODUCTION

Let's read Deuteronomy 4:1–2. The name "Deuteronomy" means "second law" or "repetition of the law." It was necessary that Moses recapitulate, summarize and state the main points again, God's law to the people because many years had passed since Israel had left Egypt, and most of the Israelites who now followed Moses were very young and had been born in the desert during the last four decades. These mostly young people now had the responsibility of teaching their own children the law of God, so that their faith would be transmitted through their generations. Here we find another important lesson of the desert: Parents should instruct their children in the way of the Lord and the leaders of the church, should instruct the youngest members in the same way.

THE MESSAGE OF GOD TO ISRAEL

Let's read verse 2 again. What are we told here? The "laws" were the Word of God and therefore were complete. How could any human being, with limited vision and knowledge, alter those perfect laws of God? Adding something to the laws would make them a burden; reducing them would leave them incomplete. So the laws must remain unchanged. Making changes to the divine law is to assume a position of authority over God, who has given the law. Religious leaders in the time of Christ did exactly that: they raised their own laws to the level of those of God, and Jesus rebuked them for it. Let's read Revelation 22:18–19 where we are given a strong warning about this.

Let's go back to Deuteronomy chapter 4. Let's read verses 4–8. God's law is designed to guide anyone to a healthy, straight, and dedicated life to God. Its purpose is to point out the sin that has been committed or could potentially be committed and teach the proper way to deal with it. The Ten Commandments, the fundamental of God's law, are as applicable today as they were three thousand years ago because they proclaim a lifestyle that God approves. They are the perfect expression of who God is and how He wants us to live.

But in addition to the Ten Commandments, God gave other laws. Are these equally important? Yes, because God never dictated a law that did not have a purpose. However, most of the laws of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, were directed specifically at Israel, and are no longer applicable to us in a literal sense. Although the eternal truths that they contain, and the principles that inspire them do still apply for us. For example, Christians do not practice animal sacrifices in worship. But the principles underlying these sacrifices, forgiveness of sin and gratitude to God, still apply. Those sacrifices prophetically pointed to the supreme sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for us.

The New Testament says that with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the laws of the Old Testament were fulfilled. This means that while Old Testament laws help us recognize our sins and correct our evil, it is Jesus Christ who takes away our sins. Jesus is now our ultimate example because he perfectly obeyed the law and modeled his true intention. Our sacrifices, which are now of praise and worship, are for Him.

Let's read verse 9. Moses wanted to make sure that the people would not forget everything they had seen God do, so he urged parents to teach their children God's great miracles. This helped parents remember God's faithfulness

and served to convey, from one generation to another, the stories that told God's great work. It is easy to forget the wonderful ways in which God has worked in our lives, but each of us can remember acts of God's faithfulness, by telling them to our children, relatives, and friends.

Let's read verses 10–14. Here are two key ideas: "Learn" and "teach." It is one thing to meet God once and hear his voice; it's another thing to remain faithful. There is always the danger of forgetting God's ways. Forgetting is a matter of the heart, rather than the mind. That is why Israel needed to discipline themselves and discipline their children by first learning and then diligently teaching God's Word to their children. In that context, the two stone tablets in which the Ten Commandments were written are mentioned. His writing was for the purpose of serving as witnesses to God's revelation so that the people would always remember his covenant with Him. Israel failed in this, but God, in His love, promised to forgive them. Let's read Jeremiah 31:33–34.

Let's read Deuteronomy 4:15–20. God commands that we worship Him only. This was the most important thing that distinguished Israel's religion from other religions. God did not allow them to make images of Him. Why? Because God does not want to be confused with any part of his own creation. The nature of God is spiritual, so He can only be known spiritually. The commandment to have no idols is to protect us from the confusion in the world, where people worship idols as gods. God fervently desires that we know him in truth and thus live in truth.

Let's read verses 21–24. God considers himself jealous and jealousy demands exclusive affection and loyalty. Some jealousy is sickly, destructive, but others are good. For example, a man demands that his wife treat him and only him as a husband is correct. God's jealousy is good because He is defending His Word and his high honor. He gives us a

strong requirement: that Him and Him alone, in all our lives and in every place, treat Him and serve him as God.

God is also considered consuming fire. What does this mean? He is morally perfect, pure, and holy. God hates sin; that is why he cannot accept those who practice it. Moses' sin prevented him from entering the promised land, and no sacrifice or plea could avoid that opinion. Sin prevents us from entering the presence of God, so our Lord Jesus Christ had to pay the price for our sin and with his death, He freed us from God's judgment. Now we have to trust Him and follow Him. If we obey Jesus, He saves us from the wrath of God and allows us to have a personal relationship with Him.

Let's read verses 25–29. Disobedience puts God's promises backward. History teaches us that Israel would fail to keep even the basics of its covenant with God, and therefore go into exile. In other words, God took away their protection. To make matters worse, while in exile, Israel would have an abundance of idols, but Israel would discover that they have no power and would soon seek God again. Let's read verses 30–40.

CONCLUSION

Do you want to know God? God promised the Israelites that they would find him when they sought him with all their heart and soul. God can be known, and He wants us to know him, but we have to want to know him. Our religious acts of service, worship, prayer must be accompanied by a sincere devotion that comes from the heart. Hebrews 11:6 says that He is a rewarder of those who seek him. God always rewards those who yearn to have a relationship with Him. In the difficult days, we are living, we are tempted to look everywhere except God for guidance and help! We trust doctors, counselors, and news commentators, but do we trust God? Let us first seek God's advice and recognize his authority over every dimension of our life.



APOSTOLIC ASSEMBLY
OF THE FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS