

LESSON 20

GREAT BIBLE THEMES

THE HEARTS THAT THE LORD CAN BLESS

In our last lesson we noticed that there are hearts that cannot receive the blessings God would have them enjoy. We gave special emphasis to the fact that the Lord promised his blessings to those who were poor in spirit; that is, to those who realize that they need God and his blessings. Possibly Christ meant for us to understand that this characteristic is basic to all others by listing it first in the beatitudes.

For our lesson today we want to consider three other characteristics of the lives that can receive heaven's blessings. We refer to the characteristics of faith, penitence and obedience. These are so frequently used that we may overlook their true significance. Here are our questions: . . .

1. Why is the life of Abraham used in our study today?
2. Give three (3) events from his life which help us understand the meaning of faith in God.
3. Write a brief paragraph in your own words which explains what is meant by "faith in God".
4. Why is repentance a hard commandment?
5. Give several ideas regarding the teaching of the Bible on the subject of obedience.

LET US LOOK TO THE BIBLE FOR OUR ANSWERS

The subject of faith in God has been discussed many times. It may be possible we use the term of faith so frequently that we take it for granted and lose sight of its real meaning. If you should be asked to explain just what is meant by "faith in God", what would you say? We know that it is essential form such verses as Hebrews 11:6, "But _____ it is _____ to _____ him: for he that _____ must _____ that _____, and that he is a _____ of them that diligently _____." In this reference the term "believe" is used for faith.

It would give us a much clearer idea of the meaning of such terms if we could see them lived out in a person's life. We have just such an individual. He is referred to in the Old Testament and in the New as the man whose faith was such that God "reckoned" it unto him for righteousness. This was Abraham who is sometimes referred to as the "father of the faithful". We want to consider three events in his life with the question in mind as to what faith really means.

For our first illustration let us look to Genesis 12:1, "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of _____, and from _____, and from _____, unto a land that _____." The next two verses give the promise God made him. Then in verse four we have the record. "So Abraham _____, as the _____ had _____"

_____.” Notice the comment made in Hebrews 11:8 regarding this call of Abraham. “By _____ Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not _____.” Let us notice that this was an action of faith. He did not know where he was going. Why, then, did he go? He was to leave his father’s house and his native country. But, why? Do you suppose he understood? He could have said, “Lord, why should I leave my country and my father’s house?” or “Why go into another country, can you not bless me here?” This, however, was not Abraham’s attitude. His was an attitude of faith. How would you state his attitude in your own words?

Another point that is clearly brought out in the verses above is that Abraham could do “by faith” only those things that God had instructed him to do. Suppose Abraham had thought this matter over and had come to the conclusion that he believed that it might be best for him to go to Africa. Would it be proper to say that “by faith” Abraham went to Africa when the Lord had not told him to do so? He could have prayed that God would protect him on his journey, but we can only do “by faith” the things God has told us to do. Notice Romans 10:17, “So then

_____ / and _____ by the _____.” If there is no Word of God on some particular topic can we speak “by faith” on that topic? We may act on our own convictions or according to our own pleasure, which in many instances would be all right, but to say that we act “by faith” implies that God has spoken and we are following his will in the matter.

A second illustration in our quest for a better understanding of the meaning of faith is to be found in Genesis 17:16-17, "and I (the Lord was speaking) will bless her (Sarah, Abraham's wife), and _____ also of her: yea, I will _____ her, and she shall be a _____; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham _____, _____ and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him _____? and shall Sarah, that is _____?" Now Sarah had never had any children and both Abraham and Sarah were both past the age for child bearing. The very idea of having a child under these circumstances seemed impossible. What would Abraham think about such a promise? Notice Romans 4:19-21 for the answer to this last question. "And being not _____, he considered not _____ now dead, when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the _____: He _____ through unbelief; but was _____, giving glory to God; And being _____ that, what he had _____, he was able to _____. You may want to read this several times to see just what faith in God really means.

Was his faith based upon a promise of God? Did he trust God to do the seemingly impossible just because he had promised, even though he could not understand how such a promise could be fulfilled? Does this give us a better idea of the meaning of living

by faith? Can the Lord bless the heart that does not believe in him?

In the course of time, Isaac was born. God promised to bless all nations through this son. This leads us to our third illustration. In Genesis 22:2 we have the story of how God further tested the faith of Abraham. And he said, Take now _____ thine _____, whom thou _____, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and _____ there for a _____ upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Abraham could have said, "Lord, you have promised to bless the world through Isaac and now you want me to give him as an offering to you. Why not offer an animal instead?" Why go to a mountain in the land of Moriah to make the offering?" You can think of many other questions and objections that he could have raised. The next verse says, "And Abraham rose up _____" to do what God asked him to do. As you read further in this chapter you find that he followed God's instructions and would have taken the life of Isaac but God stopped him and gave him a ram to offer instead. Unquestioning obedience to God was Abraham's rule even when he could not understand.

Notice the reference to this event in Hebrews 11:17-19. "By _____ Abraham, when he was _____, offered _____: and he that had received the promise offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall _____: Accounting _____ even from the _____."

Does this last expression give us an idea of what Abraham

thought? He knew that God could still bless the world through Isaac even if he should need to raise him from the dead. As we see such faith in the life of Abraham we are made to wonder about our own trust in the promises of God. Can we say we are living "by faith" when we question the plain commandments of God just because we do not see why God has given them?

Let us also notice a few passages that show the importance God attaches to repentance. John the Baptist came preparing the way for the Christ. The burden of his message was, (Matthew 3:2), "_____ : for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The last expression in Mark 2:17 gives Christ's purpose in coming into the world. "I came not to _____ , but _____ to _____." Even the angels of heaven are so concerned about the people repenting that they rejoice when this occurs. Luke 15:10, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is _____ in the presence of the _____ over _____ that _____." Paul made the following significant statement to the people of Athens. Acts 17:30, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at: but now _____ " God's concern for all men is clearly set forth in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is _____ , not willing that any _____ , but that _____."

Do these verses clearly show that the heart that finds no place for repentance cannot expect to receive the blessings God wants us to enjoy?

Some have said that this is the hardest commandment that God has given because it involves a change of heart, mind and action. It is much easier to say that I should give up a bad habit or should start doing the worthwhile things that I know I should do, or to convince myself that I should cease to have an indifferent attitude toward the work of the church, than to actually give up that bad habit or start doing the things I know I should. A real battle rages in many hearts that know what they should do but find difficulty in doing so. Would you say that such individuals are struggling with the problem of repenting? God loves that heart that is able to admit its guilt and repent of its sins.

The last characteristic of the life that the Lord can bless is that of obedience. This has been included to some extent in the first part of our lesson as an essential part of faith in God, but we want to notice the emphasis given to it in a number of passages of Scripture. Notice the importance Jesus attached to obeying God's will. Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that

_____ which is in heaven." In Hebrews 5:9 we have the statement that Jesus "became the author of eternal salvation _____." Does this definitely teach that obeying Christ is essential to our salvation. Compare this idea with Revelation 22:14, "Blessed are they that _____, that they may have right to _____, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Do these verses refer to any one specific act when reference is made to doing God's will or obeying him? Would you say, rather, that it refers to the attitude that leads one to do all

that God commands? Would we be doing justice to the teachings of the scriptures to apply obedience to baptism only?

In the fifteenth chapter of 1 Samuel we have the account of Saul, the king of Israel, wanting to substitute sacrifices to God for obedience to him. He has been told to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Instead of doing this he saved their king and the best of their sheep and oxen. He probably thought that God would take a great delight in sacrifices from this spoil. Notice verse 22, "And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in _____ and _____, as in _____? Behold, to _____ is _____, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Does this suggest that there is no substitute for obedience?

Truly the poor in spirit, who believe in God and who are penitent and obedient in disposition, have the characteristics of heart that enable the Lord to bless their lives.

TEST

1. The apostle Paul said that faith comes: (a) by prayer, (b) by hearing the word of God, (c) by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, (d) to infants after they are baptized. _____

2. Abraham (Abram) is referred to as being faithful. He showed his faith: (a) by obeying God, (b) by a verbal statement only, (c) by refusing to obey God's word, (d) by offering excuses. _____

3. Jesus said that he came to: (a) call the righteous, (b) the religious leaders, (c) tell the people they were justified before God, (d) call sinners to repentance.

4. Ignorance of God's will is now excused (winked at) by God. See **Acts 17:30-31, And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. (AKJV).** (True or False)

5. In order for a person to expect to receive the blessings only God can give, he must have: (a) Christian parents, (b) waited for the Holy Spirit, (c) a penitent heart, (d) attended services of the church at least once or twice a year.

6. Jesus said that everyone who said, "Lord, Lord," should enter the kingdom of heaven. (True or False)
7. What did Samuel say is better than sacrifices? (a) lighting of candles, (b) praying, (c) obedience, (d) faith only.

8. Without (a) a good income, (b) faith, (c) giving allegiance to some human ecclesiastical ruler, (d) criticizing the Bible, it is impossible to please God. _____
9. When we act and speak "by faith", we are acting and speaking: (a) as our conscience dictates, (b) as our church manual, discipline or confession of faith authorizes, (c) according to our particular church dogmas, (d) according to God's will which is made known unto us through His word, the Bible. _____
10. Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to: (a) all that obey him, (b) all religious persons, (c) all good moral people, (c) all men.

Score: 10 points for each correct answer _____

Correct answers to questions in lesson 19:

1. (a)
2. (false)
3. (resisteth)
4. (c)
5. (I, my)
6. (a)
7. (b)

8. (are not)
9. (no)
10. (b)

List below others who wish to take this course.