

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
First Quarter 2014: *Discipleship*
Lesson 8 “With *the Rich and Famous*”

Read for this week’s study

Deut. 8:17, 18; Gen. 13:5, 6; John 3:1–15; Luke 19:1–10; Mark 4:18, 19; Matt. 19:16–26.

Memory Text

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. Richly Blessed
- III. Nighttime Rendezvous
- IV. Rich and Infamous
- V. Gold-plated Message
- VI. Terms of Endangerment
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Moderator: Daniel Duda

1. “‘People,’ it has been said, ‘spend money they don’t have, for things they don’t need, in order to impress people they don’t like.’ How much truth that statement contains is debatable; what isn’t debatable, however, is that money can have a powerful influence over all of us.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. How much power and influence does money have over you? Is your answer close to reality, or is it wishful thinking? When does a [legitimate] desire to have more become greediness?
3. “Because personal financial habits comprehensively represent an individual’s values, money is actually a spiritual matter. No doubt that’s why the Bible spends a lot of time talking about it.” (Sabbath afternoon) How can something as material and mundane as money have spiritual significance? How does money reveal the spiritual inclinations of our heart? Why and how does money exercise its power?
4. “The Bible does not unconditionally disparage wealth or the wealthy. As with so much else in life, problems arise not from things themselves but from the way in

- which we relate to them.” (Sunday’s lesson) Why is the problem not money but our [fallen] heart? If the Bible does not disparage wealth or the wealthy, where does the idea come from that “the rich are blessed by God” or that “the poor are better”? Both of these “assumed premises” can be found in ancient and modern societies.
5. “Riches themselves do *not* indicate spiritual poverty or indifference. There have been some very pious and faithful rich people and some pretty nasty and evil ones, as well. Either way, we should not turn a desire for money into an obsession, nor should we despise those who are wealthy. They need salvation as much as does everyone else.” (Sunday’s lesson) Surely we should not despise the wealthy. Should we admire them? Can we learn something from those who are poor? What determines how you see money and its role in life? How much do our parents, their social status and position play in how we perceive things related to money?
 6. “Wealthy, well-positioned, famous people did not intimidate Jesus. Christ neither resented nor revered the social elite. The Savior recognized that financial prosperity could not supply peace, personal contentment, meaningful relationships, or deep-seated purpose.” (Monday’s lesson) Where does the idea come from that God is on the side of the rich or the poor? How can we have a balanced view toward riches, and toward both those who are rich and those who are poor?
 7. What is the significance of Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus (John 3: 1-15)? Why does John mention it and what role does it play in his gospel narrative?
 8. “Zacchaeus could have easily enriched himself *legally* as the chief regional customs officer. The narrative, however, suggests that greed induced him to overstep legal boundaries. Zealous patriots despised even honest customs collectors, seeing them as tools of their Roman oppressors...” (Tuesday’s lesson) What is it that leads people to generalize? “All rich people are...”, “all pastors, lawyers, men, women...” How can we get a realistic and balanced view of people?
 9. “We should be careful about the kind of spiritual judgments we make about people. Though not all sins are of the same magnitude, and some are certainly socially worse (and with good reason) than others, all of us are equal before God in that we are all in need of the righteousness of Christ.” (Tuesday’s lesson) So which sins are considered “socially worse”? How does social acceptance of certain behaviors in the society where we live influence our moral perception? To what extent is it understandable? Dangerous?
 10. “Think through just how easy it is for money, or the pursuit of it, to blind our spiritual priorities. How crucial that we keep this truth in mind as we seek to reach those whose wealth might have already blinded them. [...] Christ reverses our misplaced priorities. While possessions are not forbidden, they must be placed in perspective. Material goods are God’s instruments designed to benefit humanity. They become blessings when shared rather than when hoarded. When hoarded, they become curses.” (Wednesday’s lesson) How much money is enough? Why is it that historically we have not done a good job of reaching the rich? How can someone who is poor be also blinded to spiritual realities?

11. “The youthful disciple-candidate earnestly requested the Master’s formula for salvation. Should Christ have been flattered? ‘Finally we’re converting the upper classes!’ Apparently no such exhilaration polluted Christ’s thinking.” (Thursday’s lesson) Is reaching the upper classes a polluting thought or ministry? (See Friday’s lesson and Ellen White’s comment in MH 210.)
12. “Christ established the Ten Commandments as the *minimum* standard of obedience. [...] Christ outlined the three-step process: *Sell your possessions, furnish the poverty-stricken, follow Me.* This was spiritually dangerous territory.” (Thursday’s lesson) What is Matthew trying to say with this story of the rich young ruler? What role does it play in his gospel?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners—how extraordinary! What a risk to His reputation! And He suffered because of it, didn’t He? They said He was a winebibber, and He associated with these immoral people. How are you going to help people if you don’t meet them where they are? Which He has always done, and it’s very dangerous to do that. That is, harsh critics will misunderstand. But we admire it, don’t we? How marvelous that He was willing to go out and eat with these people who were regarded as the dregs of society, even stopping under the tree and saying, “Zacchaeus, I want to have dinner with you today.”

Can you imagine the Lord turning up at your front door and saying, “Could I have dinner with you today?” What would you say? Zacchaeus was overcome, wasn’t he? He came down out of that tree, and he promised not just restitution. He said, “I will give four times as much.” He was really overwhelmed. He never got over it. And that was a very wonderful occasion. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Mark*, recorded April, 1982 Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/53MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/54MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Think of the attitude of the supreme Creator of the whole vast universe and His coming down to meet us where we are, and indeed getting down on His knees and washing dirty feet in the upper room. Lucifer wanted Christ on His knees worshiping him as God. The contrast is very striking between the two.

You think of Christ accepting invitations to have lunch with publicans and prostitutes, and people who hadn’t overcome the drinking habit and you remember He was mocked as a wine bibber because He went out to eat with them? Do you remember when Nicodemus was embarrassed to be seen with his Creator? That’s an extraordinary account when Nicodemus said, “I would like to talk to you, Lord, but I would be very embarrassed to be seen talking to

you here in public. I mean, what would people say? So would you mind seeing me privately after dark?”

As you know God, would your God say, “Look, if you’re not willing to see me in public, if you’re ashamed to be seen with your Creator, then you don’t get to see me at all.” But Christ said, as it were, “I don’t want you to be uncomfortable. I don’t want you to be embarrassed. If it’s humiliating to you to be seen talking with your Creator and your Saviour in the market place, I’ll see you privately after dark.” {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapters 15 & 16, recorded February, 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/29MMROMANS66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/30MMROMANS66> (Part 2)

After Job had expressed his utter depression in chapter 3—he wished he’d never been born! Do you say, “Shame on Job for being so depressed”? Or how much do you ask of a man under those circumstances? Imagine being under similar circumstances. What do you expect of a man? Then the three friends began their counsel. And they must have been friends to talk to him as straight as they did. They were very candid with Job. And if Deuteronomy had already been written, (which it hadn’t), they could have quoted from Deuteronomy and other places in the Bible where you have the lists of the blessings and the cursings. And this idea, “if you’re good you’re blessed; if you’re bad you’re punished,” runs all the way through the Bible. And it’s the basis for the story of the rich man and the eye of the camel. Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom.” And the disciples said, “Well if that’s true, who can be saved?” And the background for that is this: You see if you’re rich it’s because you’re blessed. And you’re blessed because you’re good. Therefore, if you’re rich, you’re good. So if a rich man cannot be saved, a good man cannot be saved. That’s the way they had worked it out. And so Jesus had to tell them that story. So this prevailed right on down to the first members of the General Conference committee—when you see a man who is poor, he is a sinner. The hand of God is on him. Now isn’t that a pretty widespread view to this day?

When somebody is sick, folk in the hospital right now say, “The Lord has laid His hand on me.” Even on television programs when a disaster occurs. You know why? “I must have done something bad.” Even in “The Sound of Music”, when something good happens to the heroine, “I must have done something good,” she sings. Right? That’s been our simple view all along. When the disciples saw the blind man, they said, “Who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” That’s had a very dominant influence on our theology. So in chapter 4, the friends are saying to Job, “You know your own teachings on this subject. Now that trouble has come to you, you can’t take it.” Look at chapter 4:1:

Then Eliphaz the Terminate answered: "If one ventures a word with you, will you be offended? Yet who can keep from speaking? Behold, you have instructed many, Brother Job, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him who was stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you, [trouble has come to you] and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed. Is not your fear of God your confidence and the integrity of your ways your hope? Think now, who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same."

"So Job, you've done something terrible. We've known you for years, Job, as the most prosperous man in the area, and we all know that if you're prosperous it's because the Lord is blessing you." Isn't that what Hezekiah told them? "See all this wealth? The Lord has blessed me." "You have been greatly blessed, Job. Your family, your estate, your health. You've been a greatly honored man. Now you've lost it all. Truly God is punishing you. You must have done something very serious. Now you know also, Job, that if you will confess your sins, God will forgive you and restore your blessing and your prosperity. It's a clear case, Job. On your knees! Confess your sins, repent and God will receive you and bless you once again." And Job said, "There's something that doesn't make sense in there."

Now as we know the background, is that the cause of the trouble? Is it because he sinned? No, it's because he was such a perfect man that this was happening. It's just the other way around. Job was right, but he didn't know about chapters 1 and 2. A little later on he says, "I wish I knew. I wish I knew what the accusation is, so I could discuss it with God." But he didn't know. And here's a man without information going on with his trust in God on the basis of previous information. He knew God better than they did, or he would have accepted what they said so simply to him. But you notice what this friend says about God? Look at verse 17 of chapter 4: "Can mortal man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?"

God had said, "That man's perfect." They said, "There's no way that can be." Now, look at verse 18. Does yours read this way?

"Even in His servants, He puts no trust, and His angels He charges with error." Are they saying, "Look, God doesn't trust anybody"?

What about chapters 1 and 2? God has said, "I trust Job. He's a good man." And they were denying that that could be so. See, they didn't know about chapters 1 and 2 either, and they were denying that that could possibly be true.

Now much of what they said is right. Would you agree, as you go on, with their statements about God's majesty and power and honor, and the reverence with which He should be treated, His work as Creator? Surely it's all true. These men were believers, weren't they? They just had a very arbitrary, legalistic picture of God. So, as Job goes on, they keep expressing their

amazement at a saint's talking back to God the way he did. For example, in 11:7, they say to Job:

Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven what can you do? Deeper than Sheol; what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. [And so on.]

And then 13:

If you set your heart aright, you will stretch out your hands toward God. If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in your tents. Surely then, [see, if you confess and repent] you will lift up your face without blemish; you will be secure, and will not fear. You will forget your misery; you will remember it as waters that have passed away. And your life will be brighter than the noonday.

"God will accept you, see. That's a great case, Job. All that's wrong is you've misbehaved." Now we know that isn't true. See, they didn't know the facts. They were wrong. They were wrong about Job, and they were wrong about God. But they were believers in God, and they cared about Job. They were theologians who came to help him, and they were still wrong. And yet they weren't wrong in a rebellious sort of way, were they? And yet were they not in effect supporting Satan's charges that God seeks to win and sustain our trust by reward, rather than by being the kind of God He is? And all Job was left with, no rewards at all, all he said is, "As I know God, I don't know why this is happening. It doesn't make sense. It doesn't fit in with what I know about Him so far. But one thing does fit in. I'm sure if you would be quiet long enough and let me talk to God, and if He would come from wherever He is and talk to me, I'm sure we could work this out and it would make sense." And he was absolutely right. Because where is the 'make sense'? It's in chapters 1 and 2. You see, if you know about the great controversy, it makes sense. If you know about Satan being the accuser and God being the defender, if you know about the universe watching and God saying, "Let Me show you a really trustworthy friend. I will let Satan test him to the limit, and he won't let Me down." See, Job didn't know that. But he wasn't afraid to talk to God. He knew God that well. He had the same confidence Abraham did, that it would make sense. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Esther & Job, recorded 1982, Riverside, California}

*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

<http://pkp.cc/25MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/26MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

And the most important one of all was Jesus Christ. He was told that He was not biblical. And the point when this reached a climax was so significant. He had just delivered the Sermon on the Mount; He was in the middle of it. And He'd said some things they could not accept, such

as, “blessed are the poor,” as Luke has it. Or “blessed are the poor in spirit”, as Matthew has it. The idea is the same, that poor people who tend more than others to be aware of their spiritual need, and therefore are more teachable, can be helped. So He had hardly opened His mouth when He realized He was losing His audience. The poor blessed? Everybody knows the poor are not blessed. Because the Jews had it as a firm teaching, (and many do to this day; I’ve heard it preached on,) that “prosperity is evidence of God’s blessing, and God blesses the virtuous. So if you’re rich, you’re virtuous.”

That’s why when Job was rich; he had the respect of his friends. When he lost everything, the three theologians came to urge him to repent. I mean, to have lost his estate and his family and his health; he’d lost everything, meant that God was punishing him very, very severely. Therefore he must have done something unspeakably bad. And they came and said to Job, “We don’t know what it is, but you should confess, and then the LORD will forgive you. And He’ll restore your prosperity.” And Job said, “I don’t believe that.” And we know he was right, because up in Heaven, God was saying, “This is a perfect man.” And there was an entirely different reason why Job was passing through that experience. You see, the three theologians had this simple arrangement; “if you’re good, you’re blessed. If you’re bad, you’re punished.” And the greatest blessing is prosperity. And they were wrong. And God told them they were wrong in the end.

But the Jews held on to this view for a long time. And this is why Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to be saved”. And His comment was met with such amazement! They said, “Well, if a rich man cannot be saved, who then can?” And the point is if you’re rich, you’re good. So what Jesus seemed to be saying to the crowd was, it was easier for the camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a good person to be saved. Because they equated prosperity with virtue. So when Jesus got up and said, “Blessed are the poor”, they knew He was wrong, His very first remark in His sermon. And then, when He went on and said, “Bless your enemies” and all the rest, they said, “We thought maybe you would be the Messiah to lead us to victory over our oppressors, the Romans. And you’re saying bless your enemies? We’d never win a skirmish with you in charge.” And they were ready to throw Him overboard.

But the most serious reaction among the people was that Jesus, by talking like this, was denying the Old Testament. And Jesus knew that they were feeling that He was unbiblical, and He paused in a famous verse that we use to defend the Sabbath, which is not its purpose at all. “Not one jot nor one tittle shall pass from the law.” Jesus’ words were, “I sense that I’m losing My audience because as you’ve grown up with the Bible, I sound unbiblical. Think not that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets. I’ve not come to destroy them; I’ve come to fulfill them. To explain them. To tell you what they’re all about.” Now, the law and the prophets, as you know, is not the Ten Commandments. The Jews called the Old Testament “the

Law, the Prophets and the Writings.” That’s the longest name of the three canons that they had. Sometimes they abbreviated this to ‘the Law and the Prophets’. Sometimes they abbreviated it to just ‘the Law’. You could be quoting the Psalms, but the verse is in the Law. Jesus said, “Does it not say in your law, ‘behold your Gods’”? That’s in the Psalms. And they called it the Law; the Torah.

So Jesus is not talking about the Ten Commandments specifically. He says, “Think not that My explanations are not in harmony with Scripture.” He could have said, “I happen to be the One who inspired some of your fellow-believers to write all that down. But you haven’t been clear as to the meaning. May I explain what I inspired in the Old Testament?” But they killed Him rather than accept His explanation. But I would say that if you are denounced as unbiblical, you might be in very distinguished company. You might also be unbiblical, and so might I. So we have to pursue this, and make sure we don’t deserve this.

But as they went on listening to Jesus, and concluding time after time that He was unbiblical on this, that and the other, they finally said, “You have a devil, to be interpreting the Old Testament the way You do. You are misrepresenting God.” He said, “No, it is not I that have a devil. You are of your father the devil, and you prefer his lies to the truth.” Imagine saying that to a group of Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming Bible teachers of that day. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Larger View, part 3, recorded October, 1982, Monterey, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/3MMLVIEW>*

Further Study with Ellen White

Christ’s words were verily to the ruler the invitation, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” Joshua 24:15. The choice was left with him. Jesus was yearning for his conversion. He had shown him the plague spot in his character, and with what deep interest He watched the issue as the young man weighed the question! {DA 520.1}

The call to place all on the altar of service comes to each one. We are not all asked to serve as Elisha served, nor are we all bidden to sell everything we have; but God asks us to give His service the first place in our lives, to allow no day to pass without doing something to advance His work in the earth. He does not expect from all the same kind of service. One may be called to ministry in a foreign land; another may be asked to give of his means for the support of gospel work. God accepts the offering of each. It is the consecration of the life and all its interests, that is necessary. Those who make this consecration will hear and obey the call of Heaven. {PK 221.3}

To everyone who becomes a partaker of His grace, the Lord appoints a work for others. Individually we are to stand in our lot, saying, “Here am I; send me.” Whether a man be a

minister of the Word or a physician, whether he be merchant or farmer, professional man or mechanic, the responsibility rests upon him. It is his work to reveal to others the gospel of their salvation. Every enterprise in which he engages should be a means to this end. {PK 222.1}

After the Lord's ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world's goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus. {DA 177.1}

At this time of peril Nicodemus came forward in fearless avowal of his faith in the crucified Saviour. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin and with others had been stirred by the teaching of Jesus. As he had witnessed Christ's wonderful works, the conviction had fastened itself upon his mind that this was the Sent of God. Too proud openly to acknowledge himself in sympathy with the Galilean Teacher, he had sought a secret interview. In this interview Jesus had unfolded to him the plan of salvation and His mission to the world, yet still Nicodemus had hesitated. He hid the truth in his heart, and for three years there was little apparent fruit. But while Nicodemus had not publicly acknowledged Christ, he had in the Sanhedrin council repeatedly thwarted the schemes of the priests to destroy Him. When at last Christ had been lifted up on the cross, Nicodemus remembered the words that He had spoken to him in the night interview on the Mount of Olives, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14); and he saw in Jesus the world's Redeemer. {AA 104.1}

With Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus had borne the expense of the burial of Jesus. The disciples had been afraid to show themselves openly as Christ's followers, but Nicodemus and Joseph had come boldly to their aid. The help of these rich and honored men was greatly needed in that hour of darkness. They had been able to do for their dead Master what it would have been impossible for the poor disciples to do; and their wealth and influence had protected them, in a great measure, from the malice of the priests and rulers. {AA 104.2}

In the presence of Christ, Nicodemus felt a strange timidity, which he endeavored to conceal under an air of composure and dignity. "Rabbi," he said, "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." By speaking of Christ's rare gifts as a teacher, and also of His wonderful power to perform miracles, he hoped to pave the way for his interview. His words were designed to express and to invite confidence; but they really expressed unbelief. He did not acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, but only a teacher sent from God. {DA 168.3}

Instead of recognizing this salutation, Jesus bent His eyes upon the speaker, as if reading his very soul. In His infinite wisdom He saw before Him a seeker after truth. He knew the object of this visit, and with a desire to deepen the conviction already resting upon His listener's mind, He came directly to the point, saying solemnly, yet kindly, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3, margin. {DA 168.4}

Nicodemus had come to the Lord thinking to enter into a discussion with Him, but Jesus laid bare the foundation principles of truth. He said to Nicodemus, It is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart. You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things. Until this change takes place, making all things new, it will result in no saving good for you to discuss with Me My authority or My mission. {DA 171.1}

Nicodemus had heard the preaching of John the Baptist concerning repentance and baptism, and pointing the people to One who should baptize with the Holy Spirit. He himself had felt that there was a lack of spirituality among the Jews, that, to a great degree, they were controlled by bigotry and worldly ambition. He had hoped for a better state of things at the Messiah's coming. Yet the heart-searching message of the Baptist had failed to work in him conviction of sin. He was a strict Pharisee, and prided himself on his good works. He was widely esteemed for his benevolence and his liberality in sustaining the temple service, and he felt secure of the favor of God. He was startled at the thought of a kingdom too pure for him to see in his present state. {DA 171.2}

The figure of the new birth, which Jesus had used, was not wholly unfamiliar to Nicodemus. Converts from heathenism to the faith of Israel were often compared to children just born. Therefore he must have perceived that the words of Christ were not to be taken in a literal sense. But by virtue of his birth as an Israelite he regarded himself as sure of a place in the kingdom of God. He felt that he needed no change. Hence his surprise at the Saviour's words. He was irritated by their close application to himself. The pride of the Pharisee was struggling against the honest desire of the seeker after truth. He wondered that Christ should speak to him as He did, not respecting his position as ruler in Israel. {DA 171.3}

Surprised out of his self-possession, he answered Christ in words full of irony, "How can a man be born when he is old?" Like many others when cutting truth is brought home to the conscience, he revealed the fact that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. There is in him nothing that responds to spiritual things; for spiritual things are spiritually discerned. {DA 171.4}

But the Saviour did not meet argument with argument. Raising His hand with solemn, quiet dignity, He pressed the truth home with greater assurance, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus knew that Christ here referred to water baptism and the renewing of the heart by the Spirit of God. He was convinced that he was in the presence of the One whom John the Baptist had foretold. {DA 171.5}

Jesus continued: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." By nature the heart is evil, and "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." Job 14:4. No human invention can find a remedy for the sinning soul. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Romans 8:7; Matthew 15:19. The fountain of the heart must be purified before the streams can become pure. He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. There is no safety for one who has merely a legal religion, a form of godliness. The Christian's life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. {DA 172.1}

Nicodemus was still perplexed, and Jesus used the wind to illustrate His meaning: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." {DA 172.2}

The wind is heard among the branches of the trees, rustling the leaves and flowers; yet it is invisible, and no man knows whence it comes or whither it goes. So with the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. It can no more be explained than can the movements of the wind. A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ. These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the word from the living preacher. Suddenly, as the Spirit comes with more direct appeal, the soul gladly surrenders itself to Jesus. By many this is called sudden conversion; but it is the result of long wooing by the Spirit of God,—a patient, protracted process. {DA 172.3}

While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God. {DA 173.1}

It is impossible for finite minds to comprehend the work of redemption. Its mystery exceeds human knowledge; yet he who passes from death to life realizes that it is a divine reality. The beginning of redemption we may know here through a personal experience. Its results reach through the eternal ages. {DA 173.2}

Christ came to bring salvation within the reach of all. . . . The most erring, the most sinful, were not passed by; His labors were especially for those who most needed the salvation He came to bring. The greater their need of reform, the deeper was His interest, the greater His sympathy, and the more earnest His labors. His great heart of love was stirred to its depths for the ones whose condition was most hopeless and who most needed His transforming grace. {HP 291.4}

Jesus, the Son of the Highest, is combating the powers of Satan, who is laying every possible device whereby he may counteract the work of God. The prize for which the powers of light and darkness are contending is the soul of man. The Good Shepherd is seeking His sheep, and what self-denial, what hardships, what privations He endures! The undershepherds know something of the stern conflict, but little in comparison to what is endured by the Shepherd of the sheep. With what compassion, what sorrow, what persistence, He seeks the lost! How few realize what desperate efforts are put forth by Satan to defeat the Shepherd's purpose. When the Shepherd at last finds His lost sheep, He gathers it in His arms with rejoicing, and bears it back to the fold on His shoulders. {LHU 212.2}

The Pharisees had taught that none but the Jewish nation would be saved, and they treated all other nationalities with contempt. But Jesus attracted the attention of those that the Pharisees despised, and He treated them with consideration and courtesy. . . . {LHU 212.3}

Satan had represented the Father to the world in a false light, and by this great Gift his representations were proved untrue, for here was love without a parallel, proving that man was to be redeemed by an inconceivable cost. Satan had tried to obliterate the image of God in man in order that as God looked upon him in his wretchedness, in his perverseness, in his degradation, He might be induced to give him up as hopelessly lost. But the Lord gave His only begotten Son in order that the most sinful, the most degraded, need not perish, but, by believing on Jesus Christ, may be reclaimed, regenerated, and restored to the image of God, and thus have eternal life (*Signs of the Times*, Nov. 20, 1893). {LHU 212.4}