**2024 QUARTER 2**

**LESSON 2: 'THE CENTRAL ISSUE: LOVE OR SELFISHNESS?'**

**Memory Text:**

**“ ‘ “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).**

**SABBATH & SUNDAY 6 IMPORTANT POINTS:**

**SUNDAY TITLE: A BROKENHEARTED SAVIOR**

1. **Jesus' Heartbreak over Jerusalem:** Jesus expressed deep sorrow over Jerusalem's impending destruction, reflecting His infinite love for His people despite their rejection of Him.
2. **Satan's Strategy of Deception and Destruction:** The destruction of Jerusalem serves as a foreshadowing of Satan's strategy to deceive and destroy God's people, both through persecution and compromise.
3. **God's Love and Mercy:** Despite the impending judgment on Jerusalem, Jesus repeatedly appealed to His people in love, offering them grace and mercy and urging them to repent.
4. **Natural Consequences of Rebellion:** God allows the natural consequences of rebellion to unfold, even though He grieves over the suffering caused by human choices and the actions of the enemy.
5. **God's Instruction for Preservation:** Jesus instructed His followers to flee Jerusalem when they saw the signs of its impending destruction, demonstrating God's desire to preserve His people.
6. **Filtering Events Through God's Character:** It is crucial to interpret events through the prism of God's loving character as revealed in the Bible rather than judging His character based on circumstances.

**NOTE:** "Prism" is used metaphorically to refer to a lens or filter through which something is viewed or understood. In simpler terms, when we say *events are filtered through the prism of God's loving character*, it means that we look at events based on what we understand about God's love and goodness from the Bible. So, we interpret events according to our understanding of God's loving nature as shown in the Bible.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **Jesus' Attitude Toward His People:** What do Luke 19:41-44; Matthew 23:37-38; and John 5:40 reveal about Jesus' attitude toward His people and their response to His loving invitation of grace and mercy? How do these passages illuminate God's character?

**Answer:** These verses depict Jesus' deep sorrow over the rejection of His people despite His earnest invitations to repentance. They highlight God's relentless love and mercy toward His people, even in the face of their rebellion, revealing His compassionate and forgiving nature.

1. **God's Instruction for Preservation:** According to Matthew 24:15-20, what instruction did Jesus give to His people to save them from the coming destruction of Jerusalem? How does this demonstrate God's care and concern for His people's well-being?

**Answer:** Jesus instructed His followers to flee Jerusalem when they saw the signs of its impending destruction, indicating God's desire to preserve His people from harm. This instruction underscores His protective love and foresight for His followers' safety.

1. **Filtering Events Through God's Character:** Reflecting on the statement, "we do not judge God’s character by events we see around us; rather, we filter all the events we see through the prism of His loving character as revealed in the Bible," why is this such good counsel?

**Answer:** This counsel is essential because it reminds us to view events through the lens of God's loving character as revealed in Scripture rather than interpreting His character based on circumstances. It helps us maintain trust in God's goodness and sovereignty, even amidst trials and suffering, knowing that His ultimate plan is rooted in love and redemption.

**MONDAY**

**TITLE: CHRISTIANS PROVIDENTIALLY PRESERVED**

**Important Points:**

1. **God's Providential Care:** The events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem demonstrate God's providential care for His people, as seen in the withdrawal of the Roman armies, allowing Christians to flee to safety.
2. **Sovereignty and Divine Purpose:** Psalms 46:1 and Isaiah 41:10 emphasize God's sovereignty and assurance of His presence, indicating that He orchestrates events according to His divine purpose and provides protection for His people.
3. **Battle with Evil Forces:** Hebrews 11:35-38 and Revelation 2:10 reveal the reality of facing persecution and martyrdom in the battle against evil forces. Despite suffering, God's protection may manifest in various forms, including spiritual strength and eternal rewards.
4. **Victory Through Adversity:** The persecution faced by early Christians did not hinder the advancement of God's kingdom. Even in martyrdom, they triumphed, and God's work continued to progress, demonstrating His ultimate victory over evil.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **God's Providential Care and Suffering:** How do Psalms 46:1, Isaiah 41:10, and the account of Christians fleeing to Pella illustrate God's providential care amidst adversity? Is there a contradiction between God's protection and allowing suffering, such as martyrdom, to occur?

**Answer:** These passages emphasize God's presence and protection amidst trials, demonstrating His sovereign control over events. While God provides care and deliverance for His people, He may also allow them to face suffering and martyrdom as part of His larger plan, ultimately leading to victory and eternal rewards.

1. **Reality of God's Love Amidst Suffering:** Despite experiencing pain and suffering, the Bible writers consistently testify to the reality of God's love. How can we personally experience God's love amidst trials and challenges?

**Answer:** We can experience God's love by seeking Him through prayer, studying His Word, and cultivating a deep relationship with Him. Through faith and trust in His promises, we can find comfort, strength, and assurance of His unfailing love, even in the midst of adversity.

1. **Victory Through Adversity:** Reflecting on the statement, "By defeat they conquered," how can we apply this principle in our own lives when facing opposition or persecution for our faith?

**Answer:** Just as early Christians triumphed through adversity, we can find strength and courage in Christ to overcome challenges and obstacles in our faith journey. Despite setbacks or hardships, our steadfast commitment to Christ and His gospel will ultimately lead to victory and further advancement of God's kingdom.

**TUESDAY**

**TITLE: FAITHFUL AMID PERSECUTION**

**Important Points:**

1. **Persecution Faced by the Early Church:** The early Christians faced threats, imprisonment, persecution, and even death for their faith, as depicted in various passages from the Book of Acts.
2. **Courageous Witness and Rapid Growth:** Despite persecution, the early believers, empowered by the Holy Spirit, fearlessly proclaimed the gospel, leading to the rapid growth of the Christian church in Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and beyond.
3. **Triumph of the Gospel:** The spread of Christianity was characterized by the triumph of the gospel over pagan superstition and the shackles of Satan, as evidenced by the growth of the church even amidst opposition and persecution.
4. **Continuation of the Gospel Witness:** The spread of Christianity continued beyond the apostolic era, with subsequent generations of believers faithfully proclaiming the message of Christ despite ongoing persecution and opposition.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **Lessons from the Early Church:** What specific lessons can we learn from the early church's response to persecution and their commitment to proclaiming the gospel despite adversity? How can we apply these lessons to the challenges faced by the end-time church?

**Answer:** The early church's unwavering faith, reliance on the Holy Spirit, and commitment to proclaiming the gospel serve as inspiring examples for the end-time church. We can emulate their courage, perseverance, and dedication to Christ in the face of persecution and opposition, trusting in God's power to sustain us and advance His kingdom.

1. **Factors Contributing to Rapid Growth:** Reflecting on Acts 2:41; 4:4; 4:31; 5:42; and 8:1-8, what factors do you think contributed to the rapid growth of the early church despite persecution? How can these factors inform our approach to evangelism and ministry today?

**Answer:** The early church's unity, prayerfulness, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and commitment to witnessing played crucial roles in its rapid growth. By prioritizing these elements in our own lives and ministries, we can create fertile ground for the gospel to flourish, even amidst opposition and persecution.

1. **End-Time Church's Response to Persecution:** In what ways do you think the challenges faced by the end-time church resemble those experienced by the early Christians? How can the example of the early church inspire and guide our response to persecution and opposition in the present day?

**Answer:** The end-time church may encounter similar challenges to those faced by the early Christians, including persecution and opposition to the gospel. By following the example of the early church—remaining steadfast in faith, relying on the Holy Spirit, and boldly proclaiming the gospel—we can navigate these challenges with courage and perseverance, trusting in God's faithfulness to sustain us and advance His kingdom.

**WEDNESDAY**

**TITLE: CARING FOR THE COMMUNITY**

**Important Points:**

1. **Living the Gospel:** The early Christian church not only preached the gospel but also lived it out by demonstrating Christ's love through acts of compassion and meeting human needs.
2. **Following Christ's Example:** Believers in the New Testament era followed Christ's model of compassion and healing, reflecting His sacrificial love and concern for humanity.
3. **Restoring the Image of God:** The purpose of the gospel is to restore the image of God in humanity, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing.
4. **Cooperating with Christ:** The church plays a crucial role in cooperating with Christ to refute Satan's accusations by demonstrating Christ's love and compassion, thereby reflecting the true character of God.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **Authentic Christianity:** Reflecting on Acts 2:44-47; Acts 3:6-9; and Acts 6:1-7, what principles can we glean about authentic Christianity from the actions of the early believers? How can we apply these principles in our lives and communities today?

**Answer:** The early believers demonstrated authentic Christianity by caring for one another, meeting practical needs, and sharing the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can follow their example by actively engaging in acts of compassion, reaching out to those in need, and sharing the love of Christ in both word and deed.

1. **Restoring the Image of God:** How does the concept of restoring the image of God in humanity encompass physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing? In what ways can the church contribute to this restoration process in individuals and communities?

**Answer:** Restoring the image of God involves addressing all aspects of human well-being, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The church can contribute to this restoration process through ministries that address various needs, such as healthcare, counseling, support groups, and spiritual guidance, ultimately reflecting the holistic love and compassion of Christ.

1. **Role of the Church:** What specific actions can the church take to cooperate with Christ in proving Satan's accusations wrong and demonstrating the true character of God to the world? How can individual believers contribute to this mission in their communities?

**Answer:** The church can cooperate with Christ by actively engaging in compassionate outreach, community service projects, and ministries that address various needs. Individual believers can participate by embodying Christ's love in their interactions, serving others selflessly, and sharing the gospel message of hope and redemption. Through these collective efforts, the church can effectively refute Satan's accusations and reveal the transformative power of God's love to the world.

**THURSDAY**

**TITLE: A LEGACY OF LOVE**

**Important Points:**

1. **Essence of Genuine Christianity:** John 13:35 and 1 John 4:21 reveal that love is central to genuine Christianity. By loving one another, believers demonstrate the authenticity of their faith and refute Satan's challenge against the government of God in the great controversy.
2. **Historic Examples of Love:** Throughout history, Christian communities have exemplified love through sacrificial service, especially during times of crisis such as pandemics. The unselfish and caring ministry of early Christians during epidemics led to widespread admiration and conversions.
3. **Impact of Christian Love:** The selfless care provided by Christians during pandemics, as described by Rodney Stark in "The Rise of Christianity," not only saved lives but also demonstrated the transformative power of love, leading to a significant increase in conversions.
4. **Call to Selflessness:** The historic examples of Christian love challenge believers to die to self and manifest the same selfless spirit in their own lives. Despite the difficulty of this task, it remains a fundamental aspect of living out genuine Christian faith.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **The Role of Love in Christianity:** How does love serve as a foundational aspect of genuine Christianity, as depicted in John 13:35 and 1 John 4:21? What does it mean to love one another as Christ loved us, and how does this challenge Satan's accusations against God's government?

**Answer:** Love is central to Christianity, demonstrating the authenticity of our faith and refuting Satan's accusations against God's government. Loving one another as Christ loved us involves self-sacrifice, compassion, and genuine care for others, reflecting the character of God.

1. **Historic Examples of Christian Love:** Reflecting on the historic examples of Christian love during pandemics, as described by Rodney Stark, what lessons can we learn about the transformative power of selfless service? How can these examples inspire us to emulate such love in our communities today?

**Answer:** The selfless service of early Christians during pandemics not only saved lives but also led to widespread conversions, highlighting the transformative power of love. These examples inspire us to prioritize selflessness and compassion in our interactions, especially during times of crisis.

1. **Living Out Selflessness:** Dying to self and manifesting a selfless spirit, as exemplified by early Christians, can be challenging. How can we cultivate a mindset of selflessness in our daily lives, despite the obstacles we may face? What practical steps can we take to demonstrate Christ-like love to those around us?

**Answer:** Cultivating a mindset of selflessness requires intentional effort and reliance on the Holy Spirit. We can start by prioritizing the needs of others, practicing empathy, and seeking opportunities to serve sacrificially. Prayer, studying God's Word, and participating in Christian community can also help nurture a spirit of selflessness within us.

**FRIDAY**

**TITLE: FURTHER STUDY**

**Important Points:**

1. **Persecution as Seed of Growth:** Ellen White highlights the paradox of persecution, where the oppression of Christians actually leads to the growth of Christianity. The blood of martyrs becomes the seed of the church's expansion, as illustrated by Tertullian's quote: "The blood of Christians is seed" (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 41, 42).

**“The gospel continued to spread and the number of its adherents to increase. It penetrated into regions that were inaccessible even to the eagles of Rome. Said a Christian, expostulating with the heathen rulers who were urging forward the persecution: You may ‘kill us, torture us, condemn us. . . . Your injustice is the proof that we are innocent. . . . Nor does your cruelty . . . avail you.’ It was but a stronger invitation to bring others to their persuasion. ‘The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.’—Tertullian, Apology, paragraph 50.”—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, pp. 41, 42.**

1. **Perplexity Over Persecution:** Ellen White acknowledges the perplexity that arises when the righteous suffer at the hands of the wicked. Many struggle to reconcile God's justice and mercy with the apparent prosperity of the wicked and the affliction of the righteous (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 47).

**“The mysterious providence which permits the righteous to suffer persecution at the hand of the wicked has been a cause of great perplexity to many who are weak in faith. Some are even ready to cast away their confidence in God because He suffers the basest of men to prosper, while the best and purest are afflicted and tormented by their cruel power. How, it is asked, can One who is just and merciful, and who is also infinite in power, tolerate such injustice and oppression? This is a question with which we have nothing to do. God has given us sufficient evidence of His love, and we are not to doubt His goodness because we cannot understand the workings of His providence.”—The Great Controversy, p. 47.**

1. **Trust in God's Providence:** Despite the perplexity surrounding persecution, Ellen White emphasizes the importance of trusting in God's providence. While we may not understand His ways, we have sufficient evidence of His love and goodness, and we are called to maintain faith in Him (Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 47).

**Discussion Questions:**

1. **Value of Persecution:** Why does God allow His people to suffer persecution at times? Reflecting on Tertullian's quote, discuss how persecution has historically served as a catalyst for the growth of Christianity. How can the experience of God's love help believers maintain faith during times of persecution, even when it appears that nothing good has come from it?

**Answer:** Persecution serves multiple purposes in the life of believers. Firstly, it tests and refines their faith, strengthening their commitment to God and deepening their reliance on Him. Additionally, persecution often leads to the spread of the gospel, as the faithful witness of believers in the face of opposition can inspire others and draw them to Christ. God allows His people to suffer at times to demonstrate the authenticity of their faith, to refine their character, and to ultimately bring about His purposes. In situations where it seems that no apparent good comes from persecution, personal experiences of God's love are crucial. Such experiences remind believers of God's faithfulness and provide them with the spiritual strength to persevere through trials.

1. **Addressing Questions of Suffering:** How would you respond to a friend who questions God's presence in their suffering and struggles to understand why they are going through a difficult time despite God's love? How can we reconcile the reality of suffering with our belief in a loving and merciful God?

**Answer:** When faced with questions about God's presence in suffering, it's essential to acknowledge the complexity of human suffering while also affirming the reality of God's love and care. One response could emphasize that God is present with us in our suffering, even when we may not feel His presence. You can point some examples of biblical characters who endured trials yet experienced God's faithfulness can provide comfort and hope. Like Joseph, David, and the early church. It's also important to remind us that suffering is not a sign of God's abandonment but can serve purposes beyond our immediate understanding, such as character growth, spiritual maturity, and the advancement of His kingdom. Then we can encourage them to seek God's comfort and guidance through prayer, Scripture, and community support can help them navigate their struggles with faith.

1. **Creating a Caring Community:** Discuss practical ways in which your local church can cultivate a caring community that impacts the world. Consider initiatives such as outreach programs, support groups, community service projects, and fostering a culture of empathy and inclusivity within the church body.

**Answer:** To become a caring community that impacts the world, the local church can prioritize intentional acts of love and service both within its congregation and in the broader community. This can include organizing outreach programs to meet practical needs such as food distribution, shelter assistance, and medical care. Creating spaces for authentic relationships to develop where members can support and encourage one another spiritually, emotionally, and practically is also crucial. Additionally, fostering a culture of inclusivity, acceptance, and compassion within the church can demonstrate God's love to those who may feel marginalized or excluded. By embodying the love and compassion of Christ in tangible ways, the church can effectively witness to the transformative power of the gospel and make a positive impact on the world around them.