

BASIC NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON 8--A SUMMARY OF JESUS' TEACHINGS: PART II - SONSHIP

The realization of the true meaning of the Christ, as it applies to the individual, marks a definite stage in spiritual awakening. The next step is to realize one's relation with the Creator and with the universe. When this is accomplished, one is brought automatically into right relation with other people.

There are those who would minimize the value of Jesus' teachings by declaring that there was nothing new in them. They fail to realize that what Charles Foster Kent said of the prophet Micah, also applies to Jesus: "He who synthesizes, and makes old truths new and vital forces in human history, certainly deserves a high place among the immortal teachers of mankind." Jesus stands at the top of the list, because he fully demonstrated the reality and power of the Christ Truth, thus manifesting Sonship.

The Messianic Idea, as presented by the Hebrew prophets, prepared the way for the understanding of Messiahship. However, there are few passages in the Old Testament that prepare us for the teaching of Jesus on Divine Sonship. The prophet Hosea is an eloquent exception, as he depicted Israel as God's child in Hosea 11:1-4. God is here both paternal and maternal:

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
The more I called them,
the more they went from me;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,
and offering incense to idols.
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with bands of love.
I was to them like those
who lift infants to their cheeks.
I bent down to them and fed them.

Other notable exceptions:

I thought how I would set you among my children,
and give you a pleasant land,
the most beautiful heritage of all the nations.
And I thought you would call me, My Father,
and would not turn from following me. --Jeremiah 3:19

For you are our father,
though Abraham does not know us
and Israel does not acknowledge us;
you, O Lord, are our father;
our Redeemer from of old is your name. --Isaiah 63:16

As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for
those who fear [reverence] him. --Psalms 103:13

Nevertheless, God was more often depicted as a stern but upright Deity, at times indulging in very human moods of anger and resentment. Also, the prevailing view in First Century Judaism was that God is a stern, unforgiving Deity. This brought little comfort to the common people, who lived in poverty and resented the domination of Rome. To those, however, who could grasp the spiritual significance of Jesus' teaching--of a God whose good pleasure is to give us the kingdom--life began to have a new meaning.

BASIC STATEMENTS CONCERNING SONSHIP

Jesus declared, "The Father is in me and I am in the Father." (John 10:38) Sonship is the realization of oneness with God. Jesus' consciousness of this unity, when he began his ministry, is expressed as his being God's beloved son, in whom He is well pleased. (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22)

The reality of the individual is the spiritual Self, the Son of God. Jesus expressed the truth of our own being as well as his, when he declared that he had come forth from the Father and into the world. (John 16:28) "What is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:8) "Call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father--the one in heaven." (Matthew 23:9)

Jesus called himself the "son of man," but not in any formal sense as many Christians later believed. In part, he used the term in order not to separate himself from the people whom he wished to help. In the Aramaic language, the expression "son of man" means a human being, as distinguished from an angel or an animal.

At the same time, Jesus sought, through his life and teachings, to raise the meaning of that term until it would be synonymous with the term "Son of God." "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him." (John 13:31) Jesus claimed nothing for himself that he did not claim for all humankind. He taught, however, that each individual must receive his or her own realization of Sonship.

It has been said that the established system of Jesus' day, as well as those which followed him, "took man's pedigree from Adam," whereas Jesus claimed his pedigree from God. Jesus taught that we are all sons of God, but that we must consciously realize this, and endeavor to live in this consciousness if we are to realize the more abundant life.

Jesus showed in his own life that the consciousness of Sonship was the Source of his power. In John 10:38 and related verses, he expressed his consciousness of oneness with the Father. He said in substance, "Believe in God, your Father who is also my Father. Believe in Christ in me, but also believe in Christ in yourself, for that spirit which is within you is the essential of your being. God is Divine Spirit, and all of His manifestations are divine."

That Divine Spirit was revealed in Jesus more completely than in any other. However, it is in each one of us, ready to be revealed or expressed in its fullness, if we will but recognize it. Jesus showed that there is no limit to the activity that can be expressed or shown forth by the one who has realized Sonship.

STEPS IN THE REALIZATION OF SONSHIP

The first step in the realization of Sonship is the recognition of the Father as the Universal Source of Life, Wisdom, Power, and Supply manifesting in each individual center. He gives all things without stint or measure, for each one of us is a spiritual being, a Son of God.

The work of the individual is to recognize the Infinite Spirit as the center from which all activity springs. "My Father is still working, and I also am working," Jesus declared when his adversaries sought to slay him because he had healed on the Sabbath. (John 5:17) He knew that the Divine Activity never ceases, and that to work as the Father works is to do His will regardless of the day of the week. "The Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished." (John 5:19-20) The conscious Son of God goes forward, empowered to do the works. "The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands." (John 3:35)

The conscious Son of God has spiritual vision, for he realizes that he possesses "The true light, which enlightens everyone." (John 1:9) It is the light of every individual, which is within us. We are now God's children (I John 3:2ff). Our work is to manifest this truth here and now, and to let the light so shine that we may glorify our Father in heaven (consciousness).

No limitation is place upon anyone; and as we fulfill the Divine Plan where we are, greater opportunities open up for us. We then work with a consciousness of power; as Jesus said, "All authority in heaven [mind] and on earth [manifestation] has been given to me." (Matthew 28:18)

THE SIGNS THAT FOLLOW THE REALIZATION OF SONSHIP

The conscious Son meets each experience in life with faith and courage. Although hard experiences come into the lives of all people, these can serve as stepping-stones toward spiritual growth.

A deepening sense of power comes to those who are conscious of their innate divinity. When we turn to the Indwelling Presence, we realize that we are living expressions of the Supreme Power of the Universe.

The Son has a realization of the Unity of Being, the oneness of all life. At the Last Supper, Jesus declared: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35) Jesus taught that the very foundation of spiritual living is love or conscious unity. This is to be expressed both in right attitude and in practical service.

Sonship includes brotherhood as well as fatherhood. Love of God and love of humanity go together, and one cannot long continue without the other.

A truer and finer sense of values develops as we seek the spiritual realities of life. One learns not to condemn but to discern. "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just." (John 5:30)

"You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32) The conscious Son comes into the realization of true freedom. "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36).

As noted in John 1:9, the Logos or Cosmic Christ is the true Light which enlightens everyone. The light of the Spirit indwells every human being. By believing in the Light, we become consciously the children of light, and the Divine radiance shines through us. Then we realize that the Christ who abides, and the Son of Man who has realized Divine Sonship, are one.

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON (Luke 15:11-32)

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is really a parable of two brothers: "The Prodigal Afar Off and the Prodigal at Home."

The setting of the parable is an oriental home of luxury and wealth, which is able to supply the needs of both sons. We see the younger son, with his share of the inheritance, going out into the world expecting to find greater freedom, especially new opportunities to gratify his desires for worldly pleasures.

As long as his money lasted, certain people flattered him and sought his company. However, when that was gone, his fair-weather friends went with it. Down, down he sank in the social scale, until he reached that most menial of occupations, tending swine.

There was a famine in the land, with so little food for him that he ate the pods that were fed to the pigs. Memories of better days filled his thoughts, days when as a loved and favored son he had not known lack of any kind. Ruefully he remembered that even the servants in his father's house were abundantly cared for. Suddenly the realization came to him that he had separated himself from home and family. Would he be welcomed home if he returned in humbleness of spirit?

The prodigal made the great decision to return. For he had come to himself, and he turned his face toward the father's house where his return had been patiently awaited.

Love saw him when he was yet a great way off. The father ran to meet him and, with his arms about him, heard his humble confession, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." (Luke 15:21) There was no hesitation on the father's part, no attempt to impress upon the son a sense of his own wrongdoing. He did not demand an accounting of the wasted years. He forgave his son unconditionally.

The father called for a great feast to celebrate. The feast was prepared and, when the merrymaking was at its height, the elder son appeared. An angry frown covered his face as he learned the reason for the feasting. He refused to go in, even though his father entreated him to join them. He filled the air with angry protests "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends...." (Luke 15:29)

It is difficult to imagine a more loving rebuke to these petty, selfish complaints than the father's gentle reply: "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." (Luke 15:31) He continued, "We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found." (Luke 15:32)

And so the story ends. The joy of the Prodigal's return is dampened only by the attitude of "the Prodigal at Home," who had shut himself out by his own lovelessness and sense of separation.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son reflect the basic teachings of Jesus on God as a loving, forgiving Father who wishes to share the riches of the kingdom with His children. Never has this been set forth more convincingly.

To Truth students, this parable is far more than the story of a lost young man, or an illustration of the results of "a sinful life." It is the study of the unfolding consciousness of humanity, a page from the record of the journey "from sense to soul." Illumined souls throughout the ages have recognized our inherent divinity, and have given their interpretation of the way to come into conscious unity with our Source. But never has the essential message been given more tenderly or more lovingly.

The Father's House in the parable represents an illumined consciousness, in accordance with the archetypal meaning of a house or building. Otherwise stated, it is a symbol of the Universal Storehouse where an abundance of all things needful, to make life rich and full, awaits the right kind of demand.

You and I live in a world of unlimited possibilities for spiritual growth, and the fulfilling of all legitimate desires. We may choose only a portion of our good. We may look to the outer for opportunities for advancement, or seek for pleasures that satisfy only for the moment. But the time will come when we, too, shall be "in want," when there will be no pleasure in living only on the material plane.

There are large numbers of people who do not suffer from what the world calls lack. Yet they, too, are bound by their self-imposed limitations. They find little joy in life, and they add little to the joy of their fellow human beings. The Elder Brother is a symbol of this group. He had been obedient, industrious, and frugal, but he was self-righteous and critical. The return of the Younger Brother, and the festivities which celebrated his return, had failed to illumine "the Prodigal at Home." He did not realize that all the joys of companionship, and the enjoyment of the good things of life, were his inalienable right as a son in the Father's House. And so the story ends with the Elder Son outside. He had made his own decision. He may take his own time, but we know that somewhere, sometime he, too, will come to himself.

The fact of Sonship never changes; the Universal Storehouse is always open, ready to meet every need. As we return in true humility of spirit we re-enter the Father's House, no longer as servants but as Sons, rejoicing in the freedom of Sonship.

REQUIRED BIBLE READINGS

Reread Luke 15:11-32.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain Spiritual Sonship in your own words.
2. Why did Jesus call himself the son of man?
3. What are some of the signs that follow the realization of Sonship?
4. what are the basic teachings of Divine Science as given in the Parable of the Prodigal Son?