9-26-1936

Sunday school lesson *Helping Others*

Edward Washington McMillan

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/edward_mcmillan_papers

Part of the Asian History Commons, Biblical Studies Commons, Christian Denominations and Sects Commons, Christianity Commons, Higher Education Commons, Japanese Studies Commons, Missions and World Christianity Commons, and the Religious Education Commons
A few weeks ago two friends were enjoying a game of exercise together. One of them, finding himself in a difficult position, meditated for a moment then remarked: "I believe this game was made for men, not men for the game". Immediately he set aside the rule of the game and placed himself out of the close place and went on. The incident passed with the other friend as an interesting bit of witticism.

But I am wondering if possibly we selfish mortals do not often play the game of life about that seriously. Take it as we may choose—as work or as play—we have a well prescribed life to life with each other. And one of the very plain requirements is that we must help each other. The study of that rule is tomorrow's Sunday School lesson.

What is your view of helping others? Is it circumscribed by money? Is it mostly concerning some other particular activity? Our lesson for tomorrow names several ways of helping others.

The first of these is a sympathetic, prayerful approach to every matter which is of concern to others. In the background, we recall the Jerusalem conference, studied two weeks ago and recorded in Acts 15. That conference was called to decide whether Gentile Christians should be required to be circumcised and keep certain customs that Moses gave to Old Testament Israel. It was not disputed that Gentile Christians were entitled to salvation through Christ, but some Jewish Christians thought they should observe circumcision and some of
those Mosaic customs. Some teachers went from Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria and so taught. A council was called in Jerusalem to settle the dispute which resulted.

In that council, several speeches were made. Peter spoke first, as might have been expected. He said God put no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and that Gentiles may obtain salvation upon the same condition upon which the Jews received it. He reasoned also that it would not be right to place an old Jewish yoke upon them. James finally settled the controversy with his speech. His recommendation was that they not trouble the Gentiles with those unnecessary Jewish customs.

The principle point in all this is helpfulness. Both Peter and James went on record against binding customs which could be, at best, only a burden, not a help. The letter written and signed by that body of Christians placed emphasis upon the same point. It said: "We hear that some who went out from among us have troubled you". It concluded by saying: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things", and then it named the necessary things. Then follows our scripture lesson for tomorrow. Verses 30 and 31 read: "So they, when they were dismissed, came down to Antioch; and having gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle. And when they had read it, they rejoiced for the consolation". Out of that sympathetic, prayerful approach came the harmony which produced the rejoicing and the consolation in Antioch. Let it be remembered that the conference was not for the purpose of laying some plans. It was not to mould a sentiment. And it
was not primarily for the Jerusalem church. It was to help Gentile Christians elsewhere. Therefore, immediately after the dismissal of the conference, the agreement was rushed to Antioch and delivered. The decision helped in a better understanding of God's will. It helped Paul and Barnabas, who had stood for that will.

Would you like to be of help to somebody? Sit down and sympathetically go over his difficulties with him. Then pray with him. And when you are sure what is right, stand with him.

A second element of helpfulness in tomorrow's lesson is a Christian caution against possible misunderstanding. There is room for suspicion when a person does not want to prove himself. Paul had a habit of being cautious. When he collected money for the poor saints elsewhere, he asked that brethren be sent with him to deliver the money. And in Romans 12, he advised that brethren provide things that were honorable in the sight of all men. That same caution is found in tomorrow's lesson. The teachers who caused the trouble in Antioch lived in Jerusalem. The conference was held in Jerusalem, and Paul was returning to Antioch with the letters. But what could be done if someone said Paul forged the letters? Here is the place where the caution came in. Brethren from Jerusalem went to Antioch with Paul and confirmed the letters as genuine. There could be no appeal from this course. It lent confidence and assurance unto those who were troubled. And, what could be more helpful or encouraging than the absolute assurance that is right?
The third element of helpfulness in tomorrow's lesson is voluntary encouragement. And who is not receptive to encouragement? *A great writer once gave this bit of autobiograph[y]*. When a small boy, he spent most of his time in school trying to write verse. His teacher and class mates derided him. But one day as he walked across the campus, me dated to hand one of his verses to Bobby Burnes. After reading that verse, Burns patted him on the head and said: "You'll be a man yet, m' laddie, some day". The writer said, "I am born again that day". Up through the doubtful every soul looks at times. True course will not ask that others carry our loads for us, but the last one of us needs a little hand-press sometimes. No, that is not weakness, neither is it a desire for flattery. It is simply this: The balanced man wants to know his limitations as well as his possibilities. No man with self-respect wants to make a simpleton of himself by failing because he had too much confidence in himself. And every thinking man, when the gates ahead seem a long time opening, comes ere long to wonder if possibly he has overestimated himself. Anf that question digs deep about the foundation of a man's achievements. It is at this juncture that encouragement comes is well. The confidence of others, expressed at such times, gives added strength and renews effort. It was that encouragement that the Jerusalem church extended to the brethren in Antioch. Read again, verses 32 and 33. They say:

Under the challenge of some members from Jerusalem that their salvation was in doubt, it must have been somewhat disconcerting to the Gentiles in Antioch. Furthermore, it must have
taxed their confidence in Paul and others, who had converted and continued teaching them, because these brethren had taught them differently. They, therefore, were forced either to be tested under a lost confidence in Paul and other teachers or to be shaken somewhat by the demands of the brethren who came from Jerusalem to the extent of wondering why the difference. With this understand, read again verses 32 and 33. It was no accident that Luke told us those representatives from Jerusalem "Exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them". I wonder what it was that they were exhorted about. Did they exhort them not to be discouraged by the false alarm from Jerusalem? I hold a strong suspicion that they did. And I find much delight in the assurance that they "Confirmed them". These words describe the calm which follows the storm. From their previous unrest they had been rescued; from their erstwhile uncertainties they had been delivered. And they were settled once again in that assurance which once made them happy in Christ. And that assurance was that nothing stood between them and God. Face to face and heart to heart with Him they stood, free of all guilt and saved with an everlasting salvation. At the end of this confirmation period, the representatives from Jerusalem "Were dismissed in peace", and they returned home.

It matters much what you and I are trying to do in this respect. Little is said in the Bible of a strictly theological nature, and there is no systematic arrangement of theological teachings in the Bible. But there is a well defined life prescribed for each person to live in relation to him fellowman. In Galatians 6:10, Paul said, "Do good to
all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith". Helpfulness of an encouraging nature goes far in helping others to be their best under trying circumstances.

The fourth element of helpfulness in this lesson consists in a follow-up work. Verse 36 quotes Paul this way: "And after some days, Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brethren in every city wherein we preached the word of the Lord, and see how they fare". Then verse 41 says: "And they went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches". Here again, we have encouragement given. Let us be frank. What is the real test of one's desire to help others? And, as it bears relation to the subject of our lesson, what would be a fair test of one's Christianity? If you ask me that question, my answer is "ACTION". James gave this test when he said "Show me".

Those to whom he wrote made much ado about their faith. James drew a scene in which some widows and fatherless children stood cold and hungry then wrote "Pure religions and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and the widows in their afflictions and to keep oneself unspotted from the world". Then he drew another scene, in which some hungry brethren stood; and asked those boastful brethren: "What doth it profit if a man shall say go in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not the things needful to the body?" Action was the test of sincerity with James. And now Paul, in tomorrow's lesson, comes with the same lesson. If he had been content to make his first journey
and establish churches in Antioch, Pisidia, in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe and never return, the complexion of our study would be very different. But it was not that way. Peace and stability had been restored in the church of Antioch, Syria, but his spirit immediately stirred in behalf of the other churches. If we could have heard Paul say, "Let us go and see how they face", likely we should have heard an emphasis on the "They". He knew that Antioch and other nearby churches had been troubled. And now that they had become confirmed, his face turned toward others to see how they fared. A good test, then, of one's desire to do permanent good is found in the way he feels after leaving a given effort. It is not a good sign when one can give a few dollars or a little time then turn elsewhere and forget. That of which the desire to be really helpful is born lives longer than that. The follow-up work, then, is an important element in determining the complexion of our religion.

A fifth element in tomorrow's lesson is a distinction between the desire to be practical (and really helpful) and a course that is determined by personal attachments, or friendship. Barnabas wanted to take along on that second journey a man by the name of John Mark. Paul wanted to leave him behind. No reason is assigned why Barnabas wanted to take him, except as we might infer a reason. But Paul's objection was stated definitely. John Mark turned back on the first missionary tour, Acts 13, as the missionaries approached the borders of Galatia. And from the exceeding hardships which the missionaries suffered, we might well infer that John Mark turned back from an unwillingness to suffer
for the Christ. Paul wanted someone who would be a help in the work, not a hindrance. I wonder if possibly Barnabas did not want to "give him another chance". Well, giving a fellow another chance is very fine except when the change chances to involve Christianity in the balance. In that case, it had better be deferred.

Before closing these reflections, let us think a bit more personally. It is fearfully dangerous to study history nineteen hundred years old unless a special effort is made to be practical. So, let us now try to be practical with ourselves.

What is your program of helpfulness. You are a Christian, and you expect to stand before a class of people tomorrow and do something. What do you expect to try to do. Is it your purpose to talk about things or do you expect to develop some program of work that will help somebody meet the principles laid down in this lesson by the Holy Spirit?

Help? That means doing something for somebody else. Turn to the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew and read the closing half. You will find in that the judgment scene, at which many will be disappointed. They expected to be saved but found themselves lost. Why? Not because they taught error; not because they lived filthy lives; not because they neglected public worship; not because they were choked out religiously by the cares and ways of the world. Nor, not any of those things are mentioned in that section of Scripture. Of course such things will condemn some people, but those lost in that chapter were not lost for those reasons. Why, then, were they lost? The answer is that they looked upon needy people in jails, in cold, in hunger, and sick without trying to help
relieve them. So, again, we have traveled a cycle of thought and returned to the subject of our lesson—"Helping others". There is no escape from it in practical life. If we think of people in prisons, we are thinking of people who need help. If we think of those in hospitals and in rooms of homes, ill, we are thinking of people who need help. If we speak of those beyond the reach of the daily paper and the mail deliveries, down among the homes of the little back-street urchins, we are thinking of people who need help. If we discuss those in high stations, given wholly to the ways of the world, living in pleasure and greed, we are thinking of people who, more than anything else, need help. Some need financial help; some need encouragement; some need advice; some need teaching the way of salvation. But everybody everywhere needs something. And as children of the Lord God of heaven we are expected to be helpful to as many people as possible and in as many ways as possible. Therefore, again, we are asked: What is our program of helpfulness for the future? Do not have any? Will we not construct one? Let us not forget the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. And so may we teach tomorrow. And so may we live all the tomorrows of life.