

# THE HOME MISSION JOURNAL

VOLUME III, No. 13

ST. JOHN, N. B., JULY 9, 1901.

WHOLE No. 63

## Talking To Jesus.

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**G**oachers, statesman and authors always great conversationalists. It is said that Tasso, Dante, Gray, Hogarth, Swift, Milton, Kerwin, Chaucer, Dryden, Ben Johnson and Southey, brilliant as they were in writing and speaking, were noted for their stupidity in conversation. Goldsmith "wrote like an angel and talked like Poor Poll." It is said of Burke that he was so brilliant in conversation that one could not stop for three minutes out of the rain with him without being convinced that he was the greatest man in England. Samuel Johnson, Coleridge and Leigh Hunt were even more noted for the brilliancy of their pens.

The difference between the sermon and conversation is that in the sermon the preacher does all the talking, while the people remain silent, but in the conversation there is an interchange of thought, the opportunity for repartee and argument on both sides.

In the conversation of Jesus and Nicodemus we learn how to talk with an inquirer, and without sinning. I think, we may deduce the following rules:

### GET THE INQUIRER ALONE.

It is not well to talk on so sacred a theme as the relation of man to God when you may be heard by uninterested listeners. The consciousness that an inquirer is being listened to and criticised will prevent him from opening his heart to you or to Christ. Consult him if you can as to time and place. Nicodemus chose the time of his visit. He came at night, doubtless in order that the conversation might be private. To say that he was afraid to come in the day is going beyond the record. He was doubtless a very busy man as a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, and it was more convenient for him to come at night, as well as more private. It is something when you get a man face to face with Jesus, and when you talk to inquirers you ought to be so full of Christ that they shall be face to face with their Lord.

### LET HIM TELL YOU WHAT HE BELIEVES.

Christ did not begin the conversation. After passing courtesies of the day in an informal way Nicodemus confessed what he believed. "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." This creed of Nicodemus acknowledges Christ as a teacher with divine credentials, and that like Elijah and Elisha of old he was able to perform miracles. It is a Unitarian creed, the sort of creed held by the man who crucified the Lord, and by Paul when he was breathing threatening against those who believed in the Divinity of Jesus Christ. It has in it a patronizing tone. Mr. Otts, in his book, "The Fifth Gospel," expresses the belief that Nicodemus came to Christ as the representative of the Jewish Sanhedrim, who had sometime before passed judgment on Jesus, but did not execute the sentence for fear of the people. He thinks that the "We" includes Nicodemus and his counselors. They were willing to admit the claim of Christ as an instructor divinely commissioned, and as a miracle worker, if he would withdraw His claim that He was Divine. Such a creed Jesus will not accept. He pays no attention to the compliment it contains, but proceeds to do what he should do in talking with every inquirer.

### ANSWER HIS NEED.

"Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus does not reply to his creed, but to his need. After all the need is deeper than the creed. "Your first need, Nicodemus, is not that I should instruct you as a

teacher sent from God, or that I should perform a miracle for your benefit, but that you should be born anew. You are a cultured, educated man, but there is a need of the soul deeper than culture can supply; you are religious, a Pharisee who says his prayers and pays his tithes, but there is a need of the soul deeper than religion can supply. You may be religious enough to throw your child to the crocodile, or hold up your hands for years until the nails pass through the palms, but religion wrongly developed does not satisfy the needs of the soul. You have a high position, Nicodemus, as a member of the great Sanhedrim, but there is a need of the soul deeper than honor can satisfy. Education, religion, position, important as they may be, do not constitute the new birth. After you have heard the creed of an inquirer, reveal to him his need, and then you are ready to follow rule four.

### ANSWER HIS QUESTIONS.

Even the most earnest inquirers are apt to be full of interrogation points, and each point is a sword to parry off too near approach. "How?" is the question most frequently asked today as well as then. Curiosity in most people is very strong. They desire to know the modus operandi of everything. In this inquisitive age, that takes little for granted, they want a full explanation. The fact that a man may be born anew suggests to Nicodemus the possibility of beginning life afresh. Many of us would like to blot out the past and start again from our mothers' arms. If we could forget the mistakes, and sins, destroy our very personality, and begin life anew, some of us might be tempted to try it. But Jesus informed the Jewish ruler that it is not re-birth, but new birth; it is not beginning as an infant in the flesh, but in the spirit. It is letting the scars of sin remain while the new nature enters and subdues all that is bad.

If a man could become an infant again, he would still be fleshly. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and never can evolve a spirit. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit," and cannot be degraded into flesh. The new birth makes us partakers of the Divine nature. We become two men in one, the flesh warring against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. It is every child's right to be well born the first time; but however high the lineage and noble the parents, or godly the environment of the first birth, nothing can make it other than a birth in the flesh. Better than to be reborn of our natural parents is to be new-born of God.

### PRESS UPON HIM HIS PERSONAL NEED.

Jesus comes now very close to Nicodemus. He lays down the principle that all men to see the kingdom of God, must be born anew. He answers the questions as to how by telling him that it is a spiritual and not a natural birth. He tells Nicodemus that he may wonder as much as he pleases at the mystery of God's parts, for He is a God that hideth Himself. All life is mysterious. And now he presses upon him his personal need and duty: "Marvel now that I said unto thee Ye must be born again." I can see our Lord looking the Jewish ruler kindly in the face showing great earnestness and love in every feature, as with uplifted finger he points to him and says, "You must be born again." It is something that affects not the world in general, but you as an individual. Men are not born wholesale of the Spirit any more than they are born of the flesh. It is an individual, personal matter; and I press upon you, Nicodemus, the importance of attending to it at once. In dealing with inquirers it is not enough to say that we lay down general principles and proclaim abstract truths, that we answer their questions satisfactorily; we should press upon each one his own personal need, and urge him to accept Christ at once.

### INSTRUCT HIM.

Jesus proceeds to teach Nicodemus three

things. First as to the nature of the Messiah. "No man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven. In these words Jesus proclaims His own divinity. It is stronger than a dogmatic assertion. It leaves the inquirer to draw his own inevitable conclusions. In substance Christ says, "I who talk to you, the Son of Man, am in heaven while I am here on earth. I am omnipotent; I am God himself."

In dealing with inquirers there must be no flinching on this point. Jesus Christ is God, and before Him they must bow the knee. He will not compromise upon any flattering confession of His humanity. He is either God to be worshipped, or a bad man to be despised. There is no middle ground. Press upon every inquirer the claim of the divinity of Christ.

Then our Lord proceeds to give to Nicodemus the plan of salvation: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In other words, here is your part, Nicodemus. The Israelites bitten by the fiery serpents simply looked, at the command of Moses, to the uplifted serpent in brass. I, the Son of Man, am going to be uplifted on a Roman cross, and you, to be healed of the bite of the serpent of pride and unbelief, must look by faith, to Me. The plan of salvation is the uplifted Jesus and the looking sinner. You are not called upon to understand the relation between the look and the life it imparts; it is yours to do what is a very simple thing in itself, and God will do the rest. *Look and live.*

And now that Jesus has unfolded to him the plan of salvation, he proceeds to give the philosophy of salvation and damnation. "For," because "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son; that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The explanation of this uplifted Christ is the love of God. The explanation of the uplifted serpent in the wilderness was God's love. He loved the people so much that he wished to save them from the terrible effect of the poison. He did not see fit to remove the serpents; they remained, while he gave an antidote for their bite. God's love does not lead Him to banish sin from the world, but through the uplifted Christ, to save men from their sins. Love is the philosophy of eternal life. God does not love us because Jesus died for us.

Jesus died because God loved us. The foundation of our salvation is the love of God manifest in the death of Christ upon the cross. The philosophy of damnation is that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light. They shut their eyes and will not look to the uplifted Christ. They prefer to fondle the serpent whose sting has already entered their vitals. Hating light, they reject love and life. We have good reason to believe that Nicodemus, thus understanding the philosophy of death and life, chose life by looking away from his sins to the Christ who was to be uplifted and today he is with the Lord, having seen Him as He is in glory and become perfectly like Him.

### Philosophy.

Keep up and on:

Whatever happeneth thee is God's good will;  
If only thou couldst think it and be still,  
He careth for the sparrows on the sill,  
And thou art more.

For every day,

Put on thy soul the bride of restraint,  
Nor let her stoop to murmur her complaint--  
It takes us long to recognize the saint:  
God seeth more.

Dear heart! this toil,

This drudgery too commonplace and odd  
Is but the perfect discipline of God;  
He see the corn where we would curse the clod,  
Keep up and on.

And, praying well,

Grow sweet and strong; no ministry is vain;  
What if the weariness be far from plain?  
There is sufficient recompense for pain,  
At aftermath.