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First Quarter.

Lesson I. March 16. Mark 9: 33-42.

THE CHILDLIKE SPIRIT.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.—Mark 10: 15.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN AND ITS PRINCIPLES. The disciples were continually thinking of the new Kingdom which their Master was so soon to establish. But their plans, their hopes, their ambitions, were wrong, because they misunderstood the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. They were seeking the wrong things, they were going in a wrong direction, toward a worldly kingdom, outdazzling Solomon in all his glory; with different ranks, and grades of officers, ruling over others; with honors, and riches, and high places.

Keeping this in view we can best understand the lesson for to-day, how in their dispute the disciples were going directly away from the Kingdom, and that Jesus' method was the only possible way of entering His Kingdom, or having power therein.

II. FALSE IDEAS OF ENTERING THE KINGDOM. 33. *And He came to Capernaum:* from Cesarea Philippi. Jesus had been absent from Capernaum nor far from five months. *And being in the house.* The house was probably that of Peter (Matt. 17: 25), and so the child may have been Peter's child. *He asked them, What was it that ye disputed* (or, argued, discussed) *by the way?* They had apparently fallen behind Jesus, and by themselves fallen into a warm discussion.

34. *But they held their peace.* Deep shame kept them silent, and that silence was the most eloquent confession of their sinful ambitions. *Who should be the greatest.* Who should occupy the chief position under the King.

THE SELF-SEEKING SPIRIT leads to Satan's kingdom, not to Christ's. It is the spirit of hell, not of Heaven. It begets evils innumerable, and sorrows unspeakable.

BUT DISTINGUISH between the strong desire to improve, to have large usefulness, to grow in holiness and love; and the desire to have more honor and power, or even to be better than others. To do the very best we can in everything, is our duty.

III. THE TRUE WAY OF ENTERING THE KINGDOM. 35. At this point probably came the question of the disciples as given in Matt. 18: 1. After being silent for a time, some of the disciples asked Jesus to settle the dispute and tell them, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" *And He sat down.* As teachers did while teaching. The lesson which touched the fundamental principles of the Christian life was impressed formally and with all solemnity. *And called the twelve.* To come close to Him. He wanted all of them to hear Him. *If last of all.* Simply because the desire to be first, self-seeking, is exactly opposite to the Spirit which is the law of Christ's Kingdom, the Spirit of love, of self-denial, of helpfulness of others, of humility. Therefore the more any one has of the desire to be first, the less he has of Christ's Kingdom. So that the very desire to be first makes him last by the very nature of things. *And servant of all.* Not in the *voluntary* service, which leads higher, but in the *forced* service, which is degradation. Despotism, self-seeking, ambition, ever make a man a slave.

AN OBJECT LESSON. 36. *And He took a child.* Matthew says Jesus *called* the child: therefore it was old enough to walk. *Set him in the midst.* As an illustration; as a living parable. "An incidental indorsement of object teaching in morals. *And when He had taken him in His arms:* or enfolded His arms around him in loving embrace; showing His sympathy with childhood, and His love for children.

37. *Whosoever shall receive one of such children.* Welcome, show kindness to. This receiving is explained in Matthew (18: 5). "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child," receiving this childlike spirit into his own nature.

THE CHILDLIKE SPIRIT.—Not sinlessness, for no children are sinless. They all need to be saved from being lost, as we see a little further on (vers. 11, 14). And if none but the sinless could enter the kingdom of heaven, that kingdom, on earth, would be empty. The meaning is, You must have those qualities which are characteristic of childhood, which make the ideal childhood. As Dr. Robinson puts it, "What you would have your child be to you, that be yourself to God." These qualities are: (1) humility; (2) freedom from ambition, rivalry, or jealousy; (3) tender and gracious affection; (4) perfect trust; (5) obedience; (6) a teachable spirit; (7) unworldliness; (8) indifference to the distinctions of rank and wealth. *Receiveth Me.* (1) Has taken into his heart my spirit, the characteristics which I love and which make me what I am. (2) He shall be accepted as having done me a favor in my representative. *Receiveth not Me, but Him that sent Me.* Not me only. Not me as separated from the Father. The man's action does not find its terminus in Christ. It goes farther, and terminates on the Great Father. So that the will of him who receives Christ is in harmony with the Infinite Will.

IV. ONE WAY, BUT MANY COMPANIES WALKING THEREIN. 38. *And John answered Him: i. e.,* John's statement was suggested by the above statement of Jesus. As if he had said, How about a man we met a while ago; did he receive you, and did we not receive you in forbidding him? *We saw one.* He must have been a disciple of Christ, who was enabled by his faith, yet without a commission, to cure the possessed. *Casting out devils in thy name.* Really, and not in a wrong spirit, as did the Jewish exorcists (Acts 19: 13, 14); for it was done *in thy name.* Such workers as this man believed in him, or they would not have used his name. They were fellow-workers with him, for they were seeking to rescue the souls of men from frenzy and despair. *And he followeth not us.* First, he did not follow Jesus as one of His attendants and pupils (Luke 9: 49); and secondly, he did not follow the "twelve" as one occupying a subordinate position to theirs. Note the *us.* It is the point at which the spirit of exclusiveness and intolerance crops out. *And we forbade him.* Hindered him, so far as blaming him, and insisting on the abandonment of the exercise of his gift. Could such a man have the humble, childlike spirit? Could such an one receive Christ?

39. *Forbid him not.* It was not the disciple's business to interfere with the liberty of other people, who had as good a right to serve Christ in their way as the disciples had in theirs. He neither praises nor blames him for following an independent course. He simply declares that he must not be forbidden. *For there is no man* (no one, not merely no *man*) *which shall do a miracle*—a mighty work (not merely a miracle)—*that can lightly* (hastily, easily) *speak evil of me.* The work he has done in Christ's name will itself prevent him from forthwith using an influence against Christ.

ON ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER. 40. *For he that is not against us is on our part.* Note the social *us.* The Saviour graciously associates the disciples with himself. There is no belt or borderland between right and wrong. He who is not good is bad; but he who is not bad is good. Every one is either for Christ or against Him; neutrality is impossible. Therefore (1) let him that is not consciously working for Christ, beware lest he be found working against Him.

V. AIDING OTHERS TO ENTER THE KINGDOM. 41. *For:* Gently resuming his discourse—the child yet nestling in his arms and furnishing the text for his remarks. *For whosoever shall give you a cup of water.* Here mentioned as the cheapest of all bodily refreshments, and therefore suitable to represent the smallest act of kindness done by man to man. *In my name.* With this motive, because he belongs to Christ; with the desire to serve Christ and honor Him, and express his love to Him. *He shall not lose his reward.* Not that the *reward* is payment for merit, but that the reception of the Lord in His humble servants has its fitting end in His glory.

Note (1) that the essential element which is rewarded is the love of Christ and devotion to Him. (2) What a splendid opportunity opens here for us to do that which our hearts often prompt us, some act of personal devotion and love to Jesus. We would express our gratitude to Him personally. (3) This direct and personal service of Jesus tends to transfigure all our daily lives with the radiance of heaven.

VI. HINDERING OTHERS FROM ENTERING THE KINGDOM. 42. *And whosoever shall offend:* cause to stumble, or fall into sin. *One of these little ones that believe in me:* the weakest and feeblest of God's flock, not merely the *children*, but the little ones, in intellectual and spiritual power and in ecclesiastical position and earthly honor. The little ones still nestling in Jesus' arms.

OFFENDING THE LITTLE ONES.—Our Lord does not mean "vexing them," "making them angry," or "ill-using them," but "tempting or leading them into evil." In school the temptation is to idleness, to extravagance, and breach of school regulations. There are many other ways, such as tempting to lie, to drink intoxicating drinks, suggesting religious sneering at strictness of Sabbath keeping and obedience to parents. *It is better for him that a millstone. Were hanged about his neck, etc.* We are taken in imagination, into the presence of a certain dreadful scene. We see a millstone attached to a man's neck. The fastening, passing through the central perforation of the stone, is made secure. It is a sad sight. Yet, turning from another scene, we say "This *is* better. It is better than that the man should act the part of a seducer, and entrap a childlike follower of Jesus. *And he were cast into the sea;* which was within sight. It is better to die a thousand deaths than to lead another into sin, and thus *to murder his soul.* The offender is represented as gaining a millstone, but by that gain losing his life.

The Pastor's Call.

"Good morning, Mrs. Minty!" observed the pastor, as the door opened to his knock.

The door seemed to have a surly way with it, and opened scarcely wide enough to let the pastor in, although Mrs. Minty invited him to enter, and brushing some invisible dust from a chair with her apron, asked him to sit down.

The pastor saw at a glance that Mrs. Minty was not pleased, but he could not surmise what was the matter. He had accidentally heard that day of the sickness of her daughter, and at the first opportunity called to see the young girl. Not seeming to notice the mother's manner, he said, "I hear that Miss Maria is sick."

"Yes! and she might ha' died for all she's seen of you!" replied Mrs. Minty, with an energy that almost shook the pastor out of his seat. The pastor was a meek man, and overlooking the readiness of her reply, he asked, "How long has she been sick?"

"Two weeks, and over," said the mother.

"Have you had a physician?" inquired the pastor.

"Had a physician? What a question! Why, the girl has been almost dead! I wonder you got here before she was dead! Had a physician!"

These last words Mrs. Minty fairly ground out between her teeth with ill-suppressed scorn. It now became evident that Mrs. Minty, on each day of her daughter's sickness, and the pastor's delay in calling, had added to her wrath, and it had now reached a degree of intensity that suggested strategy or flight. The pastor resolved to try the former first.

"Ah! you have had a physician?" he observed. "How did he happen to call?"

"'How did he happen to call?' Well, did any one ever hear such a question as that?"

"Perhaps some one told him Miss Maria was sick; or perhaps he was passing and dropped in," interjected the pastor.

"Do you suppose I'd let my own daughter lie sick in the house and not send for the doctor?" fairly screeched Mrs. Minty.

"Ah, you sent for him?" said the pastor.

"Do you think he'd come if we didn't send for him? How'd he know Maria was sick?" replied the mother, looking at the pastor as though she pitied his stupidity.

"Do you always send for the physician when you want him?" asked the pastor with provoking mildness.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Minty, "What do you ask such questions as that for?"

"I did not know," said the pastor, "but that as you expected the clergyman to find out as best he could that your daughter was sick, without sending for him, you might do the same with the physician."

Something had been gradually dawning upon the mind of Mrs. Minty, which the last words of the pastor, uttered with inimitable good nature, resolved into a full intellectual surmise. Her severe face relaxed into a broad smile. "Ha, I see!" she exclaimed. "I thought them was mighty queer questions. Well, I guess I had ought to ha' sent for you, too, seeing as how I sent for the doctor. And you didn't know Maria was sick?"

"No," observed the pastor. "If I had, I should certainly have called before this. I accidently heard of her illness this morning for the first time."

"Well, really, I hope you'll excuse me! Step this way; Maria's in the back room; she'll be all sorts of glad to see you!"—*Selected.*

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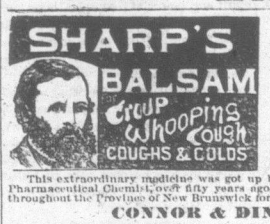

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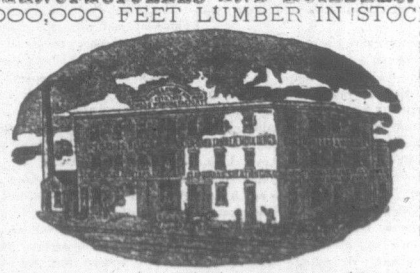
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