

the church some who would otherwise wander away;" "that other denominations readily accede to such requests and are glad to do so;" "that baptised parents are members of the church, and as such entitled to baptism for their children;" "and that Christ received little children asking no questions." It is very clear that there is great need for some authoritative deliverance on the subject as is desiderated in two of the reports, in order that the various sessions may be guided in this important matter.

(2.) *The Lord's Supper.*—When we come to the questions anent the Lord's Supper, we find that here again the facts are stated as to the frequency of its observance, rather than the opinions entertained as to the frequency with which it should be dispensed. By far the greater number appear to prefer quarterly service, though several express an opinion in favour of half-yearly observance. On the other hand a greater approximation to the primitive system of weekly communion is recommended, while again others simply desire its administration as often as convenient.

It is exceedingly difficult to arrive at anything like a correct idea of the proportion of adults who are members in full communion from the fact that some only state the number of communicants, and many do not report at all. From the information received, as far as we can judge about *two-thirds* of the adults attending our public services are communicants.

The steps taken to instruct non-communicants as to their duty, are "the preaching of the word," "private dealing on the occasion of pastoral visitation," "Bible classes," and in a few cases the very desirable institution of communicants, classes afford efficient aid in this direction.

#### IV. CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORK.

The hesitancy with which the direct questions under this head are answered together with the manifest need of reviewed interest in the prayer-meeting make it abundantly evident that there is much room for improvement in spiritual life and work. There is a fair amount of expectancy in regard to work done, and a fair portion unhesitatingly reporting progress. The report of one Presbytery expresses delight as to the state of Christian life and work discovered, while another (Glengarry) draws attention to the fact that a very decided revival of religion had occurred two years ago, and as no *falling off* had been reported, the state of religion was assumed to be good. There are many instances in which the reverse of this is the case and when Christian life and work greatly need to be revived.

Meetings for prayer are in many congregations very well attended and such services are esteemed as profitable and encouraging. Many give no report, and in some instances attention is called to the fact that attendance is not always from the "men of sterner mould" but, as we fear is too frequently the case, from the female portion of the congregation, whose interest in prayer-meetings has not been confined to the present era of the Church's history. Would that all our heads of families, at least, could feel the need of a breathing time between the Sabbaths when the spirit could be refreshed by united communion with God.

It is gratifying to find a record of liberality in many cases, even exemplary; and while depression in business is adduced as the reason in many cases for a decline in contribution, a praiseworthy effort has been made not only to implement obligation at home, but also to seek the furtherance of Christ's cause abroad.

The reports are, however, very partial; some speak only of stipends, others only of mission work, while in some cases the correspondence between the two parts is simply noted. One case mentioned is one-sixth of the whole contributions of the congregation being for missions, and another represents an average of \$16 per family. We note these cases with pleasure as an off-set to statements which show a great lack of active Christian life and give evidence that the inadequate regard for God's claims is painfully felt.

Experience proves that the best agencies for the promotion of vital godliness are the regular, earnest and faithful preaching of the gospel, "Keeping in view the cross of Christ," "For the love of Christ constraineth us," "faithful, personal dealing in private," with a wise and judicious use of discipline, and "active eldership" and "careful attention to the young by bible classes and otherwise, in the use of which means the varied, rich and precious promises of God's word

may be realized, but above all a blessed and liberal outpouring of the Holy Spirit and His divine influences exerted on the hearts and consciences of the children of men."

By way of enlisting church members in church work dependence is placed largely (when the question is answered,) on the presentation of the beauties of a practical Christianity, as a *following of Christ*, and a full Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Spirit. The answers to this question are more meagre and vague than other parts of the report, in some cases even contradictory. One says "a judicious use of evangelistic services under the guidance of authorized ministers;" another says "Not by evangelistic services which often lead to a desire to become preachers without preparation." More practical answers are the following: "Give the people work to do," "Let the people choose the workers," "Urge the chosen to work." Stress is laid on giving work to be done, but much more on the value of their own soul and the preciousness of the souls of others.

#### V. HINDRANCES.

There is comparatively little complaint as to the prevalence of sceptical or impure literature, though some of the congregations do complain of its baleful effects; about one-half of the congregations reporting speak of the evils of intemperance. Most of the reports note prevailing indifference, worldliness and selfishness as doing great injury. Romanism and Catholic persecution are in some cases adduced as operating injuriously against the cause of Christ, but in face of all these and notwithstanding of discouragements it is firmly believed that the work of Christ is making steady progress.

The following recommendations are offered as worthy of consideration:—

I. That in future greater definiteness in answering questions be attended to, and we trust greater promptitude.

II. That families be recommended to use on one part of the day, at family worship, the passages suggested on the International lesson sheet and that parents be urged to a greater diligence in catechizing.

III. Anent irregularity in connection with the administration of baptism, that an authoritative deliverance of the General Assembly be urged.

IV. The preparation of an affectionate appeal on the duty and privilege of full communion.

V. And as the great means the earnest preaching of the Gospel of Jesus, with careful consistency in the walk and conversation of members.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

## SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

### INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

#### LESSON XXIII.

June 8, 1879. } *THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES* { Ezek. xxxvii. 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."—John vi: 63.

#### HOME STUDIES.

M. Ezek. xxxiv. 11-31. .... The flock sought out.

T. Ezek. xxxvi. 16-38. .... A new heart and a new spirit.

W. Ezek. xxxvii. 1-14. .... The valley of dry bones.

Th. Ezek. xxxvii. 15-28. .... The covenant of peace.

F. Eph. ii. 1-10. .... Quickened with Christ.

S. John vi. 53-71. .... "It is the spirit that quickeneth."

S. 2 Cor. iii. 1-18. .... "The spirit giveth life."

#### HELPS TO STUDY.

Judah had reached the lowest stage of its humiliation. The news of the capture of Jerusalem had reached the prophet (Ezek. xxxiii. 21); and once more his silence is broken by the power of the divine inspiration which came upon him, and he speaks, not as before in indignation and lamentation, but in cheering words of hope, with promises of restoration. But this hope of restoration is based upon a great change in the people themselves. As sin and unbelief were the source of sorrow and calamity, so repentance would prove the way to life (Ezek. xxxvi. 11, 27, 28). The vision of the dry bones restored to life, vigour and beauty set forth in significant representation, the regeneration of Israel.

#### I. THE DRY BONES—Vers. 1-3.

The hand of the Lord rested upon the prophet. The power and energy of the Spirit lifted him up out of the things of time and sense into a state of ecstatic vision, in which he beheld a valley full of dead men's bones, very many and very dry. It was a sad and terrible sight, which might have been often seen in that time of war and tumult. A great army like Sennacherib's (2 Kings xix. 35), or a company of captives such as Nebuchadnezzar led away (Jer. xxxix. 1.) destroyed by sword or famine, or pestilence. The same vision of horrors has been again and again witnessed in

the recent wars in Europe and Asia, the battle-fields covered with the slain, the lines of retreat marked out by the bleaching bones of the fugitives who have perished. And Israel was once Jehovah's great army, His chosen people, full of life and vigour; but now as a nation, dead—Jerusalem a heap of ruins—her sons and daughters scattered as exiles over the East—nationally, morally, spiritually, a heap of dry bones in the valley, like so many chips of wood. "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth" (Psa. cxli. 7). And every sinner is dead in trespasses and sins until the world is become as a sepulchre; no spiritual life, no power, only the monotony of death, the stagnation of selfishness, the corruption and helplessness of sin.

The prophet is carried round the plain, that he may view the ghastly scene from every point, and take in and realize the extent and the hollowness of the desolation wrought by death. There they lay, an army of corpses unburied, on the face of the plain, where they had fallen. Man can do nothing here. A sense of utter helplessness and dire grief must overwhelm the spectator. Death destroys hope. The Philistines fled when they saw their champion was dead (Sam. xvii. 51.) The living army the host of Pharaoh, had struck terror into the hearts of the fugitives. But when the sea swallowed it up, and the Israelites saw the Egyptians dead upon the shore, they no longer quailed (Ex. xiv. 30, 31).

So the hosts of sin do not fear a dead church. Satan only begins to fear, and to work, and to arouse enmity and opposition when there is life and power against sin. But we may well fear and be dismayed, like the prophet, when we behold that deadness. The great lesson which God intended to teach the prophet and to teach us is the utter helplessness and insufficiency of man. The impartation of spiritual life is beyond man's power. Those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" have in themselves no power of recovery.

Then, that this lesson may be deepened and that the prophet may be convinced of the utter powerlessness of all human endeavours, God challenges him:—Son of Man (weak, therefore, and mortal), can these bones live? "God asks counsel of us that we may learn our own ignorance." Ezekiel, indeed, can see no help; but he knows that man's impossibilities may prove God's opportunities. His answer is one of great faith, Thou knowest. It is marked, too, by wisdom and by modesty. Very unlike, therefore, is it to the self-sufficient and presumptuous utterances of many who question God's promises and disbelieve His power. Who would trust more in their puny science than in the divine omnipotence. But with God nothing is impossible. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John v. 21.)

#### II.—THE LIVING CHURCH—Vers. 4-6.

Having thus proved His servant, the Lord proceeds to show that what is impossible with man is possible with God. To accomplish the great work of revivification, of restoration, God employs a two-fold instrumentality, human preaching and human prayer.

1. *The Word of the Lord*—Vers. 4-8. Again God spoke, not to explain, but to command—Prophecy, that is preach. Prediction is but one kind of prophesying, which really means, speaking for God. O ye dry bones, hear—a strange command and apparently useless. But we are commanded to preach, and no matter how much men may seem beyond the power of the Gospel or how discouraging our work, we must obey. *The Word of the Lord* is the Sword of the Spirit, which can penetrate through all the worldliness and indifference—Eph. vi. 17; Heb. iv. 12. It is the Word which quickens—John xvii. 17; 1 Peter i. 23. Which is spirit and life—John vi. 63, and which becomes the instrument of our regeneration. We are not to preach our own words, but God's. Only through it will life come. And in this well-doing, we must not weary. If we sow the seed, God will care for the harvest. While man is preaching, God is working. Behold, He says, I am causing (not "will") life to enter into you. It is all God's work, even while He is using human instrumentalities. It is life with power—sinews, and with comeliness—flesh; complete, full-orbed life. And ye shall know I am the Lord. Those who have experienced the divine life and love, have the best evidence of the truth of the Christianity. Like those whom Christ fed in the wilderness, they have eaten and are satisfied. They know that the bread of life is real, not a shadow or a mockery.

And even while Ezekiel prophesied, the results began to appear. At once the power of the Word was manifest. Obedience to God, simple, unquestioning obedience in the face of apparent impossibilities, is sure to be rewarded. There is the noise and the shaking, bone comes to bone, until the complete skeleton arises, which is quickly covered with flesh. There is all the semblance of a living body without life, a complete organization without that which alone can inhabit and use it and make it to live. Another step is needed.

2. *The Breath of Life*—Vers. 9, 10. Again the command goes forth. Prophecy to the Winds, emblems of the free, invigorating, life-imparting, omnipresent spirit of truth and love. To prophesy to the spirit, is to pray for the Spirit. Then the life came into them, they stood upright, moved and lived, an exceeding great army—Rev. vii. 9. The possession of the Spirit is the proof of life—Rom. viii. 9.

#### Ezekiel's parable has three applications.

(1) To Israel, scattered and exiled as they were, God did bring them together again, and restored their civil and religious national polity.

(2) To the resurrection of the dead. What a valley of dry bones is this earth! Yet God will raise up and restore the race of men.

(3.) To the quickening of the dead in sin, the spiritual renewal and revival of the sin-stricken soul.

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