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BIBLE LESSONS.

STUDIES IN MARK.

First Quarter.

Lesson III. January 20. Mark 1: 35-45.

HEALING OF THE LEPER.

GOLDEN TEXT.

As soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.—Mark 1: 42.

EXPLANATORY.

I. JESUS PREPARES FOR HIS WORK BY PRAYER.—Vers. 35, 36. 35. In the morning. After His exhausting labors of the previous day. Late at night, after the multitudes had departed with all their sick healed, he calmly, but surely, withdrew for the souls of all, Jesus retired to rest. He was human, and needed rest as truly as we do. Rising up. The great burden of souls rested upon him and awoke him early. A great while before day: lit. while it was very much night, i. e., before the approaching day had scarcely diminished the darkness. And departed into a solitary place: desert place in Rev. Ver., "desert" being Old English for the modern "deserted." A remarkable feature of the Lake of Gennesaret was that it was closely surrounded with desert solitudes. And there prayed. The original word does simply mean "asking." All the depths of His being would be laid open to the full and filling influx of the mind and heart and will of His Father.

NOTE. (1) Early morning prayer will be the best preparation for the day. It is assumed to be a Christian habit in the language of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Here is the correction of a nation, popularly current in these days, that one can pray equally well at all times and in all places.—Christ was accustomed to seek solitude for special occasions of prayer (Mark 5: 46; Luke 5: 16; 6: 12; 22: 41).

WHY JESUS PRAYED. The going forth alone, taking time from his needed sleep, lost no other opportunity should come to him, shows the importance which Jesus attached to secret prayer. Jesus was human as well as divine, and his human nature needed prayer as much as we need it. (1) Jesus needed communion with His Heavenly Father, to invigorate and refresh His spirit. (2) Jesus needed the things He asked for in prayer. The answers to His prayers were essential to Him. (3) He especially needed the power of God and the Spirit of God in the new movement which was about to inaugurate, the new missionary work into which he was about to enter.

SECRET PRAYER. Prayer in a solitary place was necessary in order to have opportunity to pray at all in undisturbed communion. Ejectory prayer is the blessed privilege of those who are in the height of battle, in the rush of business, in the crowd of cares; but this alone is never enough for the soul, which needs the refreshment of leisurely eating the Bread of Life.

36. And Simon. Peter, as usual, was leader in this search. Luke says the people sought Him. Followed after Him. Implying others besides the disciples, or that the disciples bore the people's message.

II. THE FIRST MISSIONARY TOUR IN GALILEE. 37. All men seek for Thee. The people wanted still to hear more, and to see more.

38. And He said unto them. The soil was ready for the good seed, and this was a reason why the time had come to inaugurate His missionary work. Let us, Jesus and His disciples. Go into the next (neighboring) towns. This I may preach there also. St. Luke gives more fully, "to publish the good news of the Kingdom of God." He worked miracles indeed, but His great object was to preach the Gospel, and the miracles were to aid Him in preaching. For, therefore came I forth (from heaven), and for this also he started out on His tour through Galilee.

THE MISSIONARY IMPULSE. (1) Here is an example of the missionary impulse—not only an illustration, but an example. It is not enough for His Gospel to bless any Capernaum; it must go out into other regions.

(2) This is utterly opposed to that spirit which is too prevalent in some churches, that they must wait till their own community is wholly converted before they give and do for the wider field.

(3) Capernaum would be evangelized all the sooner and better because he went to other places.

39. And He preached in their synagogues, as the best place for reaching the people religiously. Throughout all Galilee. Galilee at this time had probably a population of between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 people, and Josephus says there were 204 towns of over 15,000 inhabitants.

III. THE HEALING OF THE LEPER. 40. There came. Some time during this tour of Galilee. A leper. One infected with the leprosy (lepra vulgaris), the most dreadful of all the diseases to which the Jews were subject.

(1) It was a living death, as indicated by bare head, rent clothes, and covered up. In the Middle Ages, a man seized with leprosy was "clothed in a shroud, and the masses of the dead sung over him." In its horrible repulsiveness it is the Gospel type of sin.

(2) Leprosy is contagious, according to Dr. Saxe in his report of Hawaiian leprosy.

(3) All agree that it is hereditary.

(4) It is practically incurable. No certain case of cure has ever been certified.

LEPROSY AS AN EMBLEM OF SIN. "Sin is a deadly leprosy which has involved our whole race in one common ruin." (1) Sin, like leprosy, is the most loathsome, polluting, deforming, unclean thing in the universe.

(2) Sin, like leprosy, separates from the pure and clean.

(3) Sin, like leprosy, is constitutional.

(4) The tendency to sin, like the tendency to leprosy, is hereditary.

charity. The first step toward salvation from sin is to realize how sinful and guilty we are.

GOING TO JESUS FOR HELP. Jesus' marvellous cures of others had awakened hope in the leper, and he went to Him as the only possible source of health. What Jesus has done for others in saving them from sin, encourages us to go to Him for our own salvation.

THE PRAYER OF FAITH. And kneeling down. Not an act of worship, but a gesture of entreaty. If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. If Thou art willing, Thou art able. Make me clean. Cleanse my whole body from the taints of the disease. Not restore every lost limb, but take away the disease. Cleansing in what sinners need.

41. Moved with compassion. An exceedingly fine translation. Jesus felt for the leper what He and His Father feel for all sinners.—an unutterable compassion and love. Put forth His hand and touched him. The evangelists picture the act, and you see it. The Saviour did not fear contamination from contact with the leper. So we are safe about in contact with him, while it is to cure and help, and only then, I will, be thou clean (cleansed). The curative power of earthly physicians is in the fitness of the means they employ. The curative virtue of Christ is in His will, and not in instrumentalities.

42. Immediately. The cure was instantaneous and complete, showing that it was the result not of human, but divine power. The leprosy departed. The cause of this uncleanness; and then, as the result, he was cleansed.

43. See thou say nothing to any man; I, till you have shown yourself to the priest. We do not know whether the miracle was done in private, or in public, but it was in a town. (Luke 12: 4).

WHY THIS PROHIBITION. (1) There was danger that the people would become greatly excited upon hearing of His miracles, with the idea that he was about to set up a splendid earthly kingdom.

(2) Jesus would not have the leper make a boast of his miraculous cure, glory in it, and in himself as a special object of divine favor.

(3) There was need of solitary thought and meditation on the great cure wrought in the man's body, that it might have the due spiritual effect on his soul.

(4) There was danger that the minds of the people would be drawn away from the great truths of the Gospel to dwell too much on bodily and temporal blessings. Jesus' chief wish was to save men from sin, and bring back their souls to their Heavenly Father, and miracles, blessed as they were in themselves, were a means to this greater end. For a testimony unto them. (1) Unto the people that thou art healed. The danger, meeting all the reasons of which, by having the attention of those recognized authorities who were enemies to Him.

(2) In order that the officiating priest, and the other officials who are associated with him, might learn from the facts that are so transparently in Galilee.

(3) The testimony was concerning Jesus himself, that He kept the law.

45. But He went out: from the place where he was cured, into the city, and, perhaps, into the surrounding country. He went to publish the good news, in his ardent affection and zeal, he disobeyed Jesus' direct command. Some marvel much at the disobedience of a man of so much faith. Unhappily, multitudes who believe to the saving of their souls, take liberties with Christ's commands, and pick and choose amongst them, neglecting all the reasons of which they do not see, or the importance of which they do not appreciate. Remember, the supreme necessity of man is to obey orders. Inasmuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city. Not into that city or any particular one, but he could not go back into towns and cities to preach, but had to keep in the open and uninhabited places. And they came to Him from every quarter. The people kept coming to Him, notwithstanding the difficulty of reaching Him, and the inconveniences connected with a journey, even for a very limited period, in an unpopulated district. Luke says they came to hear and to be healed.

It's Good Enough.

"There! I guess that will do," said John, as he took a shovelful of ashes out of the stove. "The pan isn't empty, but I can get the stove swept in about five minutes, I can finish the story in the Fireside Companion before any one comes."

The stove was swept very much as the open space, as the best place for reaching the people religiously. Throughout all Galilee. Galilee at this time had probably a population of between 2,000,000 and 3,000,000 people, and Josephus says there were 204 towns of over 15,000 inhabitants.

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"You have been teaching me how well I could get along without you. I thought the stove needed cleaning and the stove sweeping every morning, but it seems they don't. So I shall not need you longer than this week.—Selected.

Ages to Come.

"That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."—Eph. 2: 7 (R. V.). "The ages to come"—what a wonderful prospect! How shall we, the short-lived and short-sighted children of time, bear to look into the heights and depths of that eternity called by St. Paul the "ages to come?" All that we can know is by divine revelation, and the glimpse here afforded us as to the glorious future of God's people is as elevating to the spirit as it is comforting to the heart. In that great future God will have a work to do; He will show His people that which they could not apprehend or understand now. All that can here be known of the exceeding riches of His grace is poor compared to what has yet to be revealed "in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The centuries of time are not long enough to show all this; it requires the "ages to come" for its full display. The work accomplished by Christ in His life and in His death was in one sense ended when on the cross He cried, "It is finished!" but its glorious results shall know no end; the "ages to come" will unfold more of their "exceeding riches."

How strange that we allow ourselves to be engrossed with the cares of this life even to its most petty trifles, when we have a prospect as this is set before us! How sad that we should break our hearts over the losses and the crosses of a day, and forget "the exceeding riches of his grace," to be shown in the "ages to come!" The Sunday at Home.

Killing the Dragon.

A little boy four years old was much impressed by the story of St. George and the Dragon, which his mother had been reading to him and his sister, and the next day he said to his father: "Father, I want to be a saint."

"Very well, John," said his father; "you may be a saint if you choose, but you will find it very hard work."

"I don't mind," replied John. "I want to be a saint and fight a dragon. I am sure I could kill one."

"So you shall, my boy."

"But when can I be one?" persisted the child.

"You can begin to-day," said his father. "But where is the dragon?"

"I will tell you when he comes out."

So the boy ran off contentedly to play with his little sister.

In the course of the day some presents came for the two children. John's was a book, and his sister Catherine's a beautiful doll. Now John was too young to care for a book, but he dearly loved dolls; and when he found that his sister had what he considered a much nicer present than his own, he threw himself on the floor in a passion of tears.

His father, who happened to be there, said quietly: "Now, John, the dragon is out!"

The child stopped crying, and looked quickly around the room, and then up at his father's face, but said nothing.

That evening, however, when he bade his father "good-night," he whispered: "Papa, I am very glad Catherine has the doll. I did kill the dragon!"—Temperance Banner.

A lady stood hanging on the strap of a street car, when a workman in the far corner arose and politely offered her a seat. "I thank you," she said, in a very sweet tone, "but I dislike to deprive the only gentleman in the car of a seat."

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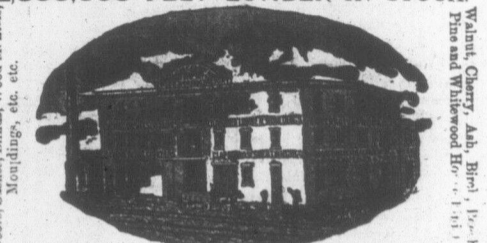
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