

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

INCARNATE ETERNAL LIFE.

By Alexander McLaren, D.D.

The Golden Text tells us that this Gospel is a selection from the life of Jesus, made with a definite teaching purpose, to establish his being (1) the Christ, and (2) the Son of God, and to evoke faith in his name as Christ and Son of God, in order to receive life from him. To kindle faith is more than to produce belief. Life is John's equivalent for salvation. This threefold purpose is kept in view throughout, and knits the separate incidents in the lessons into a unity. We may link the first four together, as showing the various sides of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God, and calling out various aspects of a life-giving faith.

He is "the door of the sheep" and "the good shepherd." Could any one less than the Son of God be the means of access to God, or give free entrance and exit into perfect security, perfect repose, perfect activity, and to complete satisfaction of all the hunger of the heart and mind? He is "the good Shepherd," and as such the one act which he points to is his laying down his life for his sheep, which he names five times in eight verses. That supreme deed is the demonstration that he is "the Christ, the Son of God," the great object for faith to grasp, the fountain from which it draws life.

The resurrection of Lazarus brings out another phase of Messiahship and Sonship, and so draws out another phase of life-giving faith. In it Jesus, who, as the Shepherd lays down his own life, stands forth as wielding the divine power of communicating life, reversing the revolution of the wheel, and calling back a dead man by the bare utterance of his will. The faith that should leap up to grasp that crowning revelation of his divinity is a faith that leans calmly and triumphantly on him as the conqueror of death, the Lord and giver of life for men.

Very beautifully the third lesson brings into connection with the great aspects of the two preceding the sweet domestic scene of the supper at Bethany, and shows us Jesus in the midst of family joys, glad to "drink of the brook by the way," able to enter into the modest feasting even when he kneels in the nearness of the cross, and casting the shield of his acceptance and praise over a "useless" expenditure by a loving heart. How that scene should hearten us all to let our life have its way, and to carry to him our best, being quite sure that there are hosts of useless things in his treasures, and that everything is precious in his sight which speaks our love and self-surrender.

The entry into Jerusalem contrasts with the supper at Bethany, and with Jesus' usual avoidance of popular demonstrations. It bears on his Messiahship as showing him deliberately "fulfilling" a Messianic prophecy in its details, and doing so at the very time when crowds gathered in Jerusalem were in the most inflammable condition. He proclaimed the nature of his kingdom, as well as claimed to be king, by riding on the peaceful ass, not on the war horse or in the conqueror's chariot, and he challenged the notice of Jewish rulers and Roman authorities, and all but defied them. These four lessons taken together bring out a wonderful combination of traits in him for faith to grasp.

But the next three lessons carry us into a holy, still place, where the very secrets of his intimate love and union with his disciples are laid open. There faith may feed on the blessed truths of the fellowship between him and every humble lover of his. The one great thought of union

with him is seen in act in the footwashing, is spoken in the emblem of the vine and the branches, and rises to its highest, sacredest expression in the intercessory prayer, the very holy of holies of this Gospel. It was because he "loved his own" which were to be left defenseless and alone "in the world," and because he knew that he had all things in his hands, that he stooped to be the servant of his servants. Therein he gave faith the material for tenderest trust and the pattern for imitation. But his lowly service and his lofty power were uniquely blended in that he stooped indeed, but stooped in order to cleanse, as he alone can do, and taught us all that, unless he cleanses us, we have "no part in" him.

The great parable of the vine and the branches brings still richer, more wonderful, material for faith to grasp, both in its disclosure of the mysterious but most real union between Jesus and every believing soul and in its revelation of the life from him permeating each twig and branch, and being the source of all fruitfulness and growth. "Believing, we have life through his name," says in plain words just what the parable says, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for severed from me ye can do"—and are—"nothing."

In the intercessory prayer that unity of Jesus and the believing soul is clothed with still greater mystery and sacredness, for it is paralleled with the ineffable union of the Father with the eternal Word, and issues in our sharing in the glory given to him, and at last in our perfect union with him in heaven, and in our there gazing forever on the glory in which we dwell forever with him.

According to the synoptics, Jesus before the sanhedrin asserted that he was "the Son of God." John records that before Pilate he claimed to be the king of the Jews. Thus his two hearings before his two sets of judges established the twofold truth as to his person and office which it was the purpose of this Gospel to set forth. That kingdom was first described by him negatively, as not of this world, that is, as not depending on the material forces by which earthly monarchies are built up; and then positively, as founded and sustained by his witnessing to "the truth," and by his being accepted by all susceptible souls as their King, the Lord of their thoughts and actions, because he thus witnesses.

It is to John that we owe the knowledge that the last word of Jesus was "it is finished." Jesus not only looked back on a life of perfect and uninterrupted conformity to the divine will, but, dying, witnessed that his death was the consummation of his life in a fashion peculiar to himself. That last triumphant "loud cry" is robbed of its meaning unless we hear in it the declaration that he came "to give his life a ransom for many," and that, precious and ransoming as all his days and deeds were, the completing climax of them all was his atoning death. The faith by which we "have life through his name" is the faith that listens to and understands that dying cry.

The three final lessons group themselves together. The resurrection of Jesus prepares the way for the message of the ascended Christ, and insures our possession, through believing union with him, of his heavenly life. The lesson that Mary learned when she would fain have clasped his feet and gone back to the old, earthly form of intimacy, was in essence the lesson that John learned in Patmos, that the truest presence of Jesus with individuals and churches does not depend on bodily nearness, and that his ascension and rest-

ful sitting at the right hand of God do not hinder our true union with him, but rather perfect it, and do not prevent, but rather invest with greater energy, his active interposition on behalf of single souls that believe on him, and of the societies of these. Mary learned that when he was ascended to the Father she could "touch" him more truly and clasp him more closely than when kneeling at his feet in the garden. John in Patmos learned that the glorified Christ could still lay his hand on a trembling disciple, and, though "sitting at the right hand" of God, could and did "walk in the midst of the golden candlesticks."

And the final vision of the city is but the perfecting of the life through believing in the Name which we possess here, and is made sure to all believers by the very fact of their present possession of that life, and of the communion which we have with Jesus here and now. If we have "Christ in us," we have therein not only he hope, but the "firstfruits," of eterna participation with him in the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, and which he has "willed" that we should share and behold forever.

Some Bible Hints.

It makes a great difference, even to an indestructible gen., whether it belongs to a crown or a junk heap (I John 2: 15-17.)

Look around and see how the world is treating God, and if you are the child of God, do not expect to be treated any better (I John 3: 1.)

Could you explain to a caterpillar what it is to be a butterfly? No more could God explain to us what we shall be (I John 3: 2.)

We become like whatever we truly see, as the sunlight lightens up whatever it falls upon (I John 3: 3.) and covers the roughest stone that receives it with the brilliancy of the King of day.

Suggestive Thoughts.

Our destiny is not to be measured by our accomplishments, but by our true purposes; not by time, but by eternity.

If you want to glorify your earth, think great thoughts of heaven.

True thoughts of the hereafter contribute to the present; weak and dreamy thoughts only weaken the present.

Half of Napoleon's power was his consciousness of a splendid destiny. When one loses that consciousness, he loses his power.

A Few Illustrations.

Every Christian is a king traveling through a foreign land incognito.

The grinding of a diamond proves that it has been found for a crown, or for some other destiny of beauty and glory.

That your life is of pure marble does not make it a lovely statue. Take it to the Sculptor.

The sky begins on the earth; so does your heavenly destiny begin with the duties of today.

To Think About.

Am I living as one with an immortal destiny?

Am I consciously preparing for my endless future?

Shall it be with me eternal death or eternal life?

A Cluster of Quotations.

Without a belief in personal immortality, religion surely is like an arch resting on one pillar, like a bridge ending in an abyss.—Max Muller.

Still seems it strange that thou shouldst live forever?

Is it less strange that thou shouldst live at all?

—Young.