

ferent. This man was in earnest—so much so that he sought a private interview, though he shrank from letting it be seen that he, the “ruler” and teacher, should go to inquire of the Galilean. And to this man, Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus did commit himself.

To get an authoritative utterance upon a subject from the person who, of all others, understands and has the right to speak upon that subject, is considered a valuable thing. We like to hear what a great statesman has to say upon an important crisis, what a business man may pronounce upon a matter of trade or speculation, especially if the thing is said spontaneously, in private conversation, and spoken in sincerity. Then what must be the value of the utterance given us in the passage for to-day! It is the free and authoritative declaration of the Son of God concerning the mind and acts of God; of the King concerning his kingdom, of the Saviour of the world concerning salvation.

Concerning the mind and acts of God.

1. What was God's mind toward the world? It cannot be a matter of indifference to us how God is minded toward men. To one who is wholly dependent upon the will and the providence of another, the favor or the wrath of that other must be of the utmost consequence. So we read in the Psalms: “In his favor is life;” “By thy wrath are we troubled.” Psa. 30. 5; 90. 7. And we must put the case even stronger. Imagine a captured rebel, whose life depends on the clemency of his sovereign. How that sovereign is affected toward him must be a matter of the deepest concern. When Louis Riel's life hung in the balance, with what anxiety and eagerness must he have looked for a declaration of the mind of the government toward him! The announcement made to Nicodemus was clear and decided. “God loved the world”; more—“God so loved the world”—the guilty, helpless world of sinners—“that he gave his only begotten Son,” to save these sinners. Thus, in one breath, we learn, not only the mind of God toward the world, but,

2. What God had done for the world. It is pleasant to know that we are loved; that there is a heart that cares for us; but the helpless, the needy, the perishing, want more than that. They want actual help, and they want it speedily. Said a peasant in the south of France when the French Revolution was on the eve of breaking out: “I hear that somewhere something is to be done for the people; may they do it speedily, for our need is sore!” Now God has done what is needed for our relief. In his eternal counsels he had done it ages before the announcement was made to Nicodemus. In actual fact it was being done then, for the “Only begotten Son” had been “sent,” and had come. And in actual fact it is finished now.

Concerning the kingdom. These guilty, helpless sinners whom God loved were to be gathered together to form a glorious kingdom unto him. A “kingdom” was what the Jews were looking for, and probably it was this that Nicodemus wanted to hear about. And he was startled to hear two things

about it. (1) Those who entered it must be born again; for (2) it was a spiritual kingdom. He, the ruler, the “master in Israel,” could not go in as he was! He must be made anew, “born of the Spirit.” How could such a thing be? And then Jesus spoke to him.

Concerning the way of salvation. “Ye must be born again”—“born of the Spirit”—but how? How does the Holy Ghost effect this wonderful new creation? The old story of the “serpent in the wilderness” makes it plain. The Son of God becomes the “Son of Man,” and is “lifted up” on the cross for a lost world. Whoever “beheld the serpent of brass” (Num. 21. 9) lived. Whoever beholds Christ crucified, as he is revealed by the Holy Spirit, recognizes his own sinfulness and accepts Christ as his Saviour. Thus he is “born of the Spirit,” becomes a new creature, a “Son of God” (chap. 1. 12); he lives; he is saved. This is Christ's own declaration concerning the way of salvation, and he taught no other way. This is the one requisite for escaping wrath and entering the kingdom.

The subject is too full to be treated thoroughly in so small a space, but I trust that what I have suggested, by way of introduction, may assist the teacher to press home the great authoritative declaration of our Lord, the lessor of the Golden Text, “Ye must be born again.”

Here are Methods.

Hints for the Teachers' Meeting and the Class.

Begin with the last lesson, and name in order the intervening events (for which see General Statement). 1. Visit to Capernaum. 2. The first passover of the Saviour's ministry at Jerusalem. 3. Cleansing the temple. 4. This interview with Nicodemus. The journeys of Jesus might be shown on the map.... Nicodemus, who he was, rank, character, after history, etc.... There are two lines of thought in this lesson. One is given in the Thoughts for Young People, “The New Birth.” Let the verses under each topic be read, and the point made plain and illustrated.... Another treatment consists in making Christ as the center of the teaching, “Who he is, and what he brings,” as shown in the Analytical and Biblical Outline. Under each head, first show “What he is,” and then “What he brings.” Read the verses, and especially the references, as each point is presented... In teaching this lesson, be careful not to bring up side-issues, and not to allow controversies. Keep to the line of its spiritual teaching, and impress on every scholar the Golden Text.

References. FREEMAN. Vol. 1: The Pharisees, 693.

CATECHISM QUESTION.

20. What do you mean by the Holy Spirit's inspiration?

That he put it into the minds of holy men to write, and instructed them how to write.

Lesson Word-Pictures.

The crowd that had gathered about Jesus during the day have now scattered. He is alone. He may be in