

BEREAN NOTES.

A. D. 33.] LESSON VII. Acts 4. 8-22. May 14.] CHRISTIAN COURAGE. HOME READINGS. MONDAY—The Lesson. Acts 4. 8-22. TUESDAY—"Be not afraid." Luke 12. 1-12. WEDNESDAY—"Your father knoweth." Luke 12. 22-40. THURSDAY—"Rather division." Luke 12. 41-53. FRIDAY—Apostolic fidelity. Acts 20. 17-38. SATURDAY—Apostolic comfort. 1 Pet. 1. 1-9. SUNDAY—Apostolic confidence. 2 Tim. 4. 1-8.

TOPIC.—Lion-like Boldness in Confessing Christ. GOLDEN TEXT.—The righteous are bold as a lion. Prov. 28. 1. 1. How does this lesson illustrate the Title, Topic, and Golden text? 2. Where does it show us how to speak for, and cling to, Jesus?

DOCTRINE.—Entire devotion to Christ. Rom. 12. 1, 2; 14. 8; Matt. 6. 24; Gal. 1. 16; Phil. 3. 8; Luke 18. 28; Josh. 1. 7; Acts 5. 29; 1 Cor. 6. 20; 2 Cor. 6. 15-18; Col. 3. 1-3; 2 Tim. 4. 6-8. GENERAL STATEMENT. Peter and John held the assembly from about three o'clock until sunset, with such results that the converts among the MEN, saying nothing of women and children, amounted to ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND. The crowd and the preaching aroused the authorities. The PRIESTS were indignant that these fishermen should teach at all; the CAPTAIN, or chief of the temple police of Levites, objected to the disorder; and SADDUCEES, who believed in no future life, disliked their publishing in the case of Jesus the doctrine of a resurrection of the dead. So they were arrested, and put in prison until the next day, when they were brought before the whole Sanhedrim, the very court that had condemned their Lord. Peter's defense exhibits a splendid example of "Christian courage," which is very properly made the TITLE. The GOLDEN TEXT beautifully describes this courage. "The righteous are bold as a lion," which in the case of the lesson the TOPIC sets forth as a "Lion-like boldness in confessing Christ." The OUTLINE names two respects in which it is shown. (1.) "In speaking for Jesus," and (2.) "In clinging to Jesus." From the whole we deduce the DOCTRINE of Entire devotion to Christ.

VER. 8. FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST. Thus did Jesus fulfill his word. Luke 21. 12-15; Matt. 10. 19. The Spirit taught Peter at the moment what answer to make. Caiaphas presided, as he did when Jesus stood alone in the spot where Peter, John, and the once lame man now stood. The great court of the nation was assembled to investigate the question how this miracle, whose reality is admitted, was wrought. Was it by the POWER of Jehovah, or was it by magical art, incantations, or the utterance of such a name as Solomon, Abraham, Jacob, Jesus, chap. 19. 13-15, or God, as a word of power. They very well knew what NAME had been used, but they also knew that they had sentenced Jesus to death as a blasphemer. It was their duty, as the religious guardians of the nation, to make this inquiry, but they had already decided in their own minds that the apostles were wicked impostors. Peter respectfully recognizes their authority, addressing them as RULERS, which, as the Sanhedrim, they were, and ELDERS, men of age and wisdom.

9. IF WE BE. Rather, since we are. EXAMINED. It was a judicial inquiry. GOOD DEED. Benefit conferred. MADE WHOLE. Rather, saved. That the man had been IMPOTENT, that he was healed, and that a real good had been done, are undisputed facts. BY WHAT MEANS, that is, BY WHOM, it was done, is Peter's statement of what they would learn.

10. BE IT KNOWN, How boldly it rings! YOU ALL. Rulers, representatives of the nation. ALL THE PEOPLE. He would gladly have the whole nation hear his voice. The glorified Christ has sent his apostle to the very spot where himself had been defeated and rejected, and to the very men who pronounced his doom and thought they had forever crushed him and his cause, with a proclamation of his authority and a challenge of their submission. The only contest is grandly renewed. BY THE NAME OF Jesus, Messiah, the Nazarene, chap. 3. 6. The rulers knew Jesus only as a malefactor and impostor, but Peter proclaims him Messiah as against their judgement of blasphemy. He will leave no room for doubt as to whom he means, and adds, the Nazarene, WHOM YE CRUCIFIED. On his own statement, then, they were ready to pronounce him guilty of a crime for a miracle in another name than God's. But he went on: WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD, against the action of the Omnipotent against their own, and showing their awful guilt. Then was the time, if ever, to retort the charge of stealing the body. THIS MAN. Known to them, and standing in their presence. WHOLE. Sound, well.

11. THE STONE. These rulers were the pillars of the Church of God, here compared to a house. Christ was the stone which God meant them to use as the chief stone in the foundation, but they refused and cast him aside as worthless. But God went on without them, and has

chosen the apostles for builders instead. 12. Peter has now replied to the question. And then he goes on to proclaim Jesus as the only Saviour of men from sin, and to assert the impossibility of SALVATION in any other NAME or person. God has GIVEN HIM and no other. Men are lost to start with, and he is come to save them. His is the only atoning blood, and his the only arm that has power to save. His atonement is the only ground of the salvation of those who die in infancy, and of the few among the heathen who, though they never heard of him, live up to the light they have, and would receive the Gospel if they could only hear it. Peter would have the rulers embrace this salvation then and there.

13. BOLDNESS. A noble, Christian courage. UNLEARNED. Not scholars, skilled in Jewish literature. IGNORANT. Private men, not in public life. They wondered at the calmness and freedom of their speech. TOOK KNOWLEDGE. They recognized, or recalled the fact of their former discipleship to Jesus, which they knew before. John 18. 15.

14. SAY NOTHING. The sight of the man simply STANDING speechless shuts their mouths. They sit self-convicted. But will they accept Jesus as their Lord? 15. 16. The apostles withdraw, the judges consult. They admit the genuineness of the miracle, its known character as such, and its wide publicity, and say WE CANNOT DENY IT. Modern infidels can. Their question ought to be, What shall we do if he saved? It is instead, WHAT SHALL WE DO TO THESE MEN, who are either base deceivers and ought to be punished, or messengers of God and ought to be heard?

17. 18. NO FURTHER. They will suppress the truth of and prevent the SPREAD of this doctrine of salvation. STRAIGHTLY THREATEN. Strictly forbid with threats. Recalling their prisoners, they forbade them to SPEAK privately at all, or to teach publicly in the NAME of Jesus. Thus the proud Sanhedrim proves basely coward.

19. YOU MORE THAN..... GOD. Hu man law must not contravene God's law. If it does, it must be disobeyed and the penalty suffered. The apostles had God's command in spoken terms, chap. 1. 8, the proof of which was in the miracle before them, and to disobey was to sin against him. These Sadducean scribes insisted that they must be obeyed rather than God.

20. CANNOT. Not a physical impossibility; but they cannot be silent respecting Jesus without displeasing him by their disobedience. Consistency and duty will not let them.

21. LET THEM GO. Repeating their threats, and not daring to PUNISH THEM for fear of a popular disturbance, because of the manifest injustice of punishing men for being God's instruments in a work which he only could do. ALL MEN recognized the benefit and praised God for it.

22. FORTY YEARS. Not a child, or a young man, who might get over the weakness, but so old that there was no hope from ordinary means. Lessons. 1. Such boldness as Peter's well becomes all confessors of Jesus now both young and old. Many, perhaps, could die for him who can hardly confess him by word. We are not called to die for him, but we are called to tell the story of his saving love. Acts 4. 32, 41; Matt. 10. 32, 33, 38; Rom. 10. 10; Psa. 66. 16. 2. Nothing is safe but duty. Duty to God comes first. Suppose Peter and John had obeyed the Sanhedrim! How would it have affected Christ's cause? How their own souls? How their case at the judgement? Duty carried with it peace, God's approval, and heaven. Luke 12. 4, 5; Isa. 61. 7, 8; 1 Pet. 3. 16, 17; 4. 14-16; John 14. 21.

A CURIOUS LETTER.

Mr. Wesley wrote the following letter Mr. S.—, at Armagh, in Ireland, April 24, 1786: "Be active, be diligent, avoid all laziness, sloth, indolence. Fly from every appearance of it, else you will never be more than half a Christian. Be cleanly. In this let the Methodists take pattern by Quakers. Avoid all nastiness, dirt, slovenliness, both in your person, clothes, house, and all about you. Do not stink above ground.—This is a bad fruit of laziness; use all diligence to be clean, as one says—'Let thy mind's sweetness have its operation Upon thy person, clothes, and habitation.' Whatever clothes you have let them be whole; no rents, no tatters, no rags.—These are a scandal to either man or woman, being another fruit of vile laziness. Mend your clothes, or I shall never expect you to mend your lives. Let none ever see a ragged Methodist. It is unless prescribed by a Physician. It is an uncleanly and unwholesome self-indulgence; and the more customary it is the more resolutely should you break off from every degree of that evil custom. Use no snuff unless prescribed by a physician. I suppose no other nation in Europe is in such vile bondage to this silly, nasty, dirty custom as the Irish are. * * * Touch your custom as the liquid fire. It is a sure though slow poison. It saps the very springs of life. In Ireland, above all countries in the world, I would sacredly caution from this, because the evil is so general, and to this and snuff and smoky cabins, I impute the blindness which is so common throughout the nation."—Wesley's Letters, p. 81.

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