

SUNDAY  
SCHOOL

## The Quiet Hour

YOUNG  
PEOPLE

## THE FRIEND OF SINNERS.

By Prof. James Stalker, D.D.

The enumeration of representative miracles is still continued; but, at verse 9, it is interrupted by an incident which is not a miracle—the Call of Matthew. By this intrusion, however, the continuity of sentiment is not broken; for the attitude of Jesus in dealing with the paralytic and his presence among the former companions of Matthew bring him before us in the same character—as the Friend of Sinners. As both incidents took place in "his own city" (v. 1)—which was not Nazareth, but Capernaum, to which he had removed, as we have already learned in 4:13—it is not necessary to look upon the call and decision of Matthew as altogether sudden. On the contrary, the publican may have been watching closely the walk and conversation of his fellow-citizen, and his decision may have been the culmination of many thoughts long stirring in his mind. Even the paralytic may not have been altogether ignorant of him with whom he had to do.

The Son of Man and the Forgiveness of Sin.—In the series of miracles now being studied the place of faith is worthy of close attention; and in this miracle of the paralytic it is especially prominent. The faith of the four friends who brought their bedridden neighbor is mentioned as moving Jesus to act. Other instances as well as this one prove that faith may be potent on behalf of others no less than in one's personal interest; and this is a wide sphere wherein faith may exercise itself and grow strong. Had the faith of the four friends been stimulated by that of the paralytic himself? or was it the opposite way—did they bring one only partially willing, or at least very dubious about the reception he would receive? It is possible that his illness had been brought on by misconduct, and that this may have made him shy of being brought into the presence of One who was known to be a searcher of the heart. In the looks he directed toward Jesus and in the looks Jesus cast on him, much may have been expressed of penitence on the one side and pity on the other. If, as we are told in verse 4, Jesus detected, without words, the thoughts of the scribes, much more might be transacted between sinner and Saviour through the traffic of the eyes. At all events, Jesus went straight to the higher blessing, and, before saying a word about the paralysis, told the man that his sins were forgiven.

To the scribes this utterance gave immediate offense; because they thought he had spoken blasphemy and was usurping the province of God. But Jesus vindicated the words he had spoken by an incontrovertible argument: He had declared the man's sins forgiven; but any one with hardihood enough might do the same, for who could tell whether or not in the invisible world, where the forgiveness of sins must take place, anything had really happened? Yes, but in the visible world, where every eye can see what takes place, he would perform that which was the counterpart and equivalent of what, he alleged, had taken place in the world invisible; and there and then he told the paralytic to stand up and walk.

Every conceivable intellectual device has been employed to prove that Jesus did not, in this or any case, forgive sins, but only did what is done in certain Christian churches, when the minister declares to those who are penitent the divine pardon, or what any one who has forgiven himself may do when he assures the despairing that God is merciful. But how easy it would have been for Jesus to give this explanation and so escape the charge of blasphemy! Yet he did not give it.

Verse 8 is, indeed, quoted as if it meant that Jesus had only exercised a power belonging to all men; but what the beholders were rejoicing it was rather the great new gift given "to men," that is, to mankind, in the glorious healing and forgiving ministry of Jesus.

Jesus Among the Publicans.—There is every probability that the Matthew whose Gospel we are now studying and the Matthew whose call to follow Jesus is narrated here are one and the same person; yet how quietly is the incident introduced! and the only other passage in the Gospel where the name is mentioned is in the next chapter, where the whole reference consists of the four words, "And Matthew the publican." What a contrast to some biographies where the writer avails himself of every opportunity to drag in his own personality, and the book seems more a life of the author than of the subject of the biography! As quickly as possible Matthew makes haste to disappear behind the figure of his Master. Indeed, the story of his call is here told as if it were only an introduction to the feast with the publicans and sinners, at which Jesus was present, and of the wonderful words he uttered on that occasion.

When the evangelistic passion awoke in Matthew's soul, his first impulse was to get his former friends and associates to listen to his new Master; and his own personal popularity, as well as the sensation created by his call, seems to have made the gathering a large one. As the fact that Matthew had been a publican, and probably also a sinner in a decided sense, did not prevent Jesus from calling him, so the character of Matthew's associates did not prevent Jesus from sitting down with them or preaching to them the gospel. Where should a physician be but where disease is? and, the more desperate the case, the more is he in his place when he is on the spot, doing his utmost for suffering humanity.—S. S. Times.

## THE YEAR OF OUR LORD.

To know that we are sent upon God's errand, under his Spirit's guidance, in a world which he controls; to walk in confidence with Christ and work with him, to find him in the brotherhood of men, the affections and refreshments of home, in the beauty of God's handiwork and man's; even in the stress of business, the shock of trouble and the valley of the shadow of death; to use our time and strength for him and help, not hinder, in his revelation of himself to men—by these things and by these only shall we obtain the best the new year offers. It can never in the deepest sense be our year till it is Christ's. Then it may become a stone to be built into the temple of God's glory, a thrilling note in the great music which shall express the redeemed and growing life of man on earth.

## A PRAYER.

O Lord, we pray that Thou wouldst help us day by day as we go in and out in the discharge of the common and constantly recurring duties, the little things which make up the sum of our lives. Oh! that they may be great even whilst small, because they are done as unto the Lord. And may all our trivial tasks and transient circumstances help to the more possession of the greatest thing, hearts filled with Thy love and with Thyself. Teach us, we pray Thee, the secret of peace and of power. May we keep firm hold of Thy hand, whatever we have to do, and wherever it may lead us. And may we, in our new circumstances, find the old strength coming with new power to us, and fitting us for each moment as it emerges from the dark. Amen.

## A PRISONER'S REFLECTIONS.

By C. H. Wetherbe.

The editor of the Sunday School Times recently printed a letter which he had received from a man in prison, in an eastern state. It is a long letter, and I will quote only a small part of it, as follows: "I am an inmate of this penal institution. I have a sentence of eight years and four months, of which three years and four months still remain to be served. Since my incarceration I have been studying and doing all in my power to improve myself and make a decent citizen of myself. I, at first, was trying to do this without the help of Christ. I figured that as I had managed to get into this state without help, I ought to get out without calling on Jesus. I was thus struggling along until one day a chance remark, made by a fellow inmate, called my attention to the religious side of the question. The remark was, 'I wish I could see and accept Jesus' help toward a better life as easily as I accepted the help of Satan.' The remark brought a flood of thought to me, and I saw that I had had help to scramble down, although the devil had cunningly allowed me to think I was 'it,' or, in other words, the whole thing."

I wish that my readers could have the whole of this intensely interesting letter before them; but what I have quoted is greatly significant. That man is suffering year after year as one result of his criminal sins. He now frankly acknowledges that it was his own fault which brought him to prison. He does not put the blame upon anyone else.

Another good feature is, he is anxious to become a much better man. He wants to make "a decent citizen" of himself, when the time shall come for his release from prison. He is awfully tired of such a life as he had lived. Nothing could induce him to repeat such a course.

Then note his conclusion, that he could not make himself what he ought to be by his own powers. He struggled to better himself, but failed. He came to the hour when he realized that he needed and must have the help of Christ. This is the best of all! He got Satan's help to ruin himself, even without asking for it; now he asks Christ to help him out of the pit where he got in so easily, and I am sure that He will.

The final purpose of the shining lives of the children of God is that men may glorify the Father in heaven. Spiritual magnetism is to draw men to God. Our winsomeness in Christ is also for Christ. Only then is the Christian life truly attractive when others are drawn by us but past us to Jesus Himself for a supply of that same life which has filled our character and influence with alluring grace.

Human sympathy is of the faintest kind, compared with God's sympathy. Perhaps you have never thought that he is sorry for you in your weakness, or sickness, or disappointment, or trouble. But he is sorry for all of us. And yet not sorry in the sense that will prevent him from doing the best thing for us. God loves us enough to discipline us.

My faith is that there is a far greater amount of revelation given to guide each man by the principles laid down in the Bible, by conscience and by Providence, than most men are aware of. It is not the light which is defective. It is an eye to see it.—Norman Macleod.

The best service we can render is a sacrifice with which God is well pleased, no matter how imperfect it may be.