



LESSON II.—JULY 9.

Hezekiah's Prayer.

Isaiah xxxviii., 1-8.

Golden Text.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Ps. xli., 1.

Commit verses 4-6.

Home Readings.

Monday, July 3.—Is. xxxviii., 1-8.

Tuesday, July 4.—Is. xxxviii., 9-22.

Wednesday, July 5.—II. Kings xx., 1-11.

Thursday, July 6.—II. Kings xx., 12-21.

Friday, July 7.—Ps. cxviii., 14-29.

Saturday, July 8.—II. Chron. xxxii., 24-33.

Sunday, July 9.—II. Chron. xxxvi., 14-21.

(By Davis W. Clark.)

That good sovereign, Hezekiah, the twelfth king of Judah, was in the very midst of his far-reaching reforms—reversing the evil policy of his father, both in foreign and domestic affairs. He had either witnessed the destruction of Sennacherib, or else the Assyrian invasion was just then impending. He was as yet without an heir to his throne, and being in the heyday of young manhood thought of providing for a successor seems not to have crossed his mind. At such a time the sudden announcement of his immediate demise took of the nature of a personal and national disaster. He was the last man to be spared. How could reforms proceed without him? How could the desolating tide of invasion be stayed if he did not stand in the fore?

Under the circumstances the message of Isaiah to Hezekiah seems curt, if not cruel, 'Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.' But the personal relations of love and confidence which maintained between the two men make it improbable that there was anything harsh in the manner in which the message was delivered, or resentful in the way it was received.

The suffering king turned his face to the wall of his chamber. He did not wish to see or be seen. He converted the intervening space into an oratory, in which he was alone with God. There he gained a greater victory than he ever gained in counsel chamber or on battle-field. He struck the personal element from the equation. With the self-oblivion of a lofty nature he rose above the question of profit or loss to self. He was the father of his people, and how should they do if left fatherless? He could call God to witness the integrity and self-denying record of his reign, and plead the probability that this record would be maintained to the close to the glory of God and the welfare of the people.

The test had been made. In the hottest crucible the unalloyed gold of the king's character had been proven. The grief-stricken prophet had not yet quite crossed the palace courtyard after delivering the dread message, when he was halted and bidden to recall it. Space will be given the king to consummate his reforms and defend his empire against invasion.

Concession is made to a sign-loving spirit. From the bed-chamber window the king and the prophet look down upon the terrace, where the 'step-clock' of Ahaz stands. They see a marvel. The shadow returns ten steps on the dial, which it had covered.

The ransomed king breaks out in a hymn of praise, improvised after the manner of the East, which is one of the jewels of the Old Scripture. 'He thought he must needs go hence in the noontide of his days. His abode was plucked from above him like a shepherd's tent. He had rolled up his life as a weaver cuts the cloth from the loom. But he found himself withheld from the bottomless pit.

Death does not praise God. The living, the living, he praises him.'

THE TEACHER'S LANTERN.

The Bible delights to picture its heroes not in forensic arena nor in field of battle, but in act and attitude of prayer—Abel at his altar; Noah on dripping rocks of Arrat; Moses on the heights, with Aaron and Hur holding up his weary arms; Daniel at his window, open towards Jerusalem; Peter on the house-top; Paul in Straight Street, and many others.

We have two pictures of Hezekiah at prayer; both vivid and significant. In one instance it is prayer for the nation; in the other for himself. In the latter instance, indirectly at least, it was a prayer for the nation also, and so, largely disinterested. Probably this was chiefly the ground on which it was heard.

Hezekiah had an instinct for prayer. He could pray at a moment's notice. The bird is not always flying; but it is ready to fly at an instant. We need not pray literally without ceasing; but we can be ready to spread the pinions of the soul and speed to the mercy-seat any instant.

There was, of course, an unexpressed condition in the apparently categorical message, 'Thou shalt die.'

It is an open question whether it is discreet to let persons know that death is imminent. Isaiah was sent to tell Hezekiah. He had no option in the matter.

The narrative is true to the Eastern temperament when it tells us that the doomed king wept aloud. The Orient is demonstrative. It never restrains its emotions, either of joy or sorrow.

'Set your house in order' is as good an advice for the living as for the dying. For to be ready to live, is to be ready to die.

It has been admirably said that prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance, but taking hold of his willingness.

There are great gains of going down into the valley of the shadow of death. Hezekiah was a good man before; but he was a better man and king after that experience. But the gains do not accrue arbitrarily. Many go down and return empty-handed. One needs to think and remember.

Isaiah used and honored the materia medica of his day, when he placed the poultice of figs upon the king's wound. Means are never to be discarded.

There is a good and an evil sign-seeking. Jesus discriminated between them. His evil generation asked, but really did not want any sign. Unalterably set in their prejudice, the greatest wonder would have left them unconvinced. No sign was given such.

Hezekiah, like Gideon, felt the need of some visible token, and it was not withheld. A more appropriate sign could not be conceived of. The recession of the shadow meant added time.

The paragraph introduces the reader to one of the ever-living heroes of the world. Like the onyx stones on the high priests' shoulders, piety and patriotism were Isaiah's ornaments. He was a royal spirit, whether he was literally of kingly descent or not. His writing is, as ever-living as himself. Dull mind that which is not moved by it!

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, July 9.—Topic—The indwelling Christ. Col. ii., 6-10; iii., 8-16.

Junior C. E. Topic.

WHAT TO CHOOSE.

Monday, July 3.—Choose a blessing. Deut. xi., 26-28.

Tuesday, July 4.—Choose to serve God. Josh. xxiv., 15-21.

Wednesday, July 5.—Choose the good part. Luke x., 42.

Thursday, July 6.—Choose to repent. Deut. xxx., 1-10.

Friday, July 7.—Choose God's command. Deut. xxx., 11-14.

Saturday, July 8.—Choose life and good. Deut. xxx., 15-18.

Sunday, July 9.—Topic—What God wants us to choose. Deut. xxx., 19, 20.

It is not success, but obedience, that is the measure and conditions of a Christian's joy.—James Millar.

Dont's For Teachers.

'Don't come unprepared.'—Some teachers do. And 'tis a pity, 'tis true. But look out that it is not you. Pity the people who endure the preacher who goes to his pulpit unprepared. He is to provide them spiritual food. Have mercy on the class who have a teacher who comes unprepared on the lesson. He is to give them moral and spiritual instruction. The means for preparation are plentiful: Original study, teacher's meetings, lesson helps, collateral reading, and daily observations for practical illustrations on the lesson.

'Don't lean on your own understanding.'—If you do, you will fall and fail, for it is a fragile prop. Every teacher must seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and enlightenment. He who has given to the Word its inspiration is alone able to illumine its sacred pages and interpret it to us. Always aim to get the mind of the Spirit, and not the understanding of man. The first method will help to build up character, the other will tend to 'puff up.'—The Rev. A. Y. Haist, in the 'Evangelical S. S. Teacher.'

Bread Cast Upon the Water.

A preacher, addressing himself to Sunday-school teachers, related two instances of great encouragement, which should prove some inspiration to wearied ones of little faith. Two gentlemen met on a steamer during a Scotch excursion, and they talked with interest of many things, amongst others of Sunday-schools.

'To tell the truth,' said one, 'I am not very enthusiastic about that kind of work. I was a teacher for many years, and after all I seemed to have done no good.'

'Well, I do believe in Sunday-school work,' said the other. 'As a lad I received life-long influences for good in my old class at school; and he named the school with which he had once been connected.'

'Were you there?' cried the other; 'that was where I taught. Were you there in my time? My name is—'

'And I was your scholar. I remember you now.'

The younger man gave his name, and memories succeeded each other concerning the old school, unforgotten by both. There, side by side, stood the teacher, who believed he had done nothing and the man he had influenced for life.—'American Messenger.'

The Company it Keeps.

'An amusement is known by the company it keeps,' might be a fair variation of the old proverb. The doubtful amusements, against which the Church has uttered her voice, will always be found to have kept very bad company indeed.

The Church does not condemn arbitrarily, but on long and full evidence, harmful recreations. They may, at times, keep good company; but in the worst times, among the most vicious people, they have most flourished.

The question, 'What sort of people are most given to this amusement, the world over?' is a fair one to put with regard to any doubtful recreation, and its answer may help us to a decision as to our own stand in the matter.—'Christian Age.'

Smothered Seed.

In the Bible class room, at the superintendent's desk, or in the pulpit there is a danger of overheaping soil on the seed of truth. Too much comment may kill out the life of the text.

To begin with, he who sows must have clearly in his mind the difference between seed and soil. The seed is the word—God's word—not man's thought upon that word. That word needs to be handled as 'seed.' It should be handled with judicious care, and not smothered with overmuch soil of explanation.—Exchange.

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