

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLEJOHN THE FORERUNNER OF
JESUS.*

1. Luke tells us, with marked definiteness, just what days are here referred to—the days when John came preaching. (See Luke 3: 1, 2.) It is because Luke is thus definite that we are able to determine the year in which the ministry of Jesus began; for we know that Pontius Pilate became Governor of Judea in the year 26-8, which was also the fifteenth year from the time when Tiberius Caesar became associated with his father Augustus, two years before the death of the father. It is not needful that we be able to determine to a day or to a month when John came; but we are sure that we have the right date. A preacher is one who declares the word of God as the word of God, and who dare not add to or take from that which God has commissioned him to proclaim. Such a one was John; and therefore he is said to have preached.

2. That word, "repent," is very significant. It means a change of mind not only, but such a change as results in a different course of life, a hatred of that which is loved, and a love for that which before was lightly esteemed. It may be truly said that repentance involves as regeneration. There can not be a true Gospel repentance without a regeneration—so deep and radical is the meaning of the word. The Kingdom of Messiah was to be more than an earthly kingdom. And it was to such a kingdom that John referred. It was the long-looked-for kingdom now at hand.

3. The prophet Isaiah had used this language (see Isa. 40: 3), when he would comfort God's people, telling them of the blessed time that was surely coming to them who looked and longed for it. Before that time should come there would come a voice in the wilderness, and now John is declared to have been he who was there spoken of. Thus the prophecy was fulfilled.

4. The manners of John were rude and uncultivated, as were those of Elijah. He did not stop to ask what men might think of him, but gave himself to the performance of his mission. He paid little or no regard to clothing or food. Thus he was prepared to go anywhere or suffer any loss, in the accomplishment of his work. In these respects, as well as in his bold fearlessness, he resembled Elijah, who lived and wrought in the days of Ahab, King of Israel. (See I. Kings 17, etc.)

5. By these words we are not to understand that everybody went, but only that people from all sections, of every rank and condition in society, went out to hear John's message, and of those who went many believed, so far as to accept his baptism and be numbered among those who looked for "the Coming One."

6. When it is said that John baptized in the river Jordan it does not mean that he immersed them. They found this a convenient place for the service, and at, or in, the edge of the stream John applied to them the water as a type of the spiritual cleansing they needed and must receive from on high. In every instance John required of them a confession of their sins; and if some confessed with the lips while their hearts were still hard and unrepentant, it was their own fault, not John's.

7. The Pharisees and Sadducees were those classes of the people who prided themselves on the uprightness of their lives; and especially the former had set themselves a rule, or, rather, had framed a great list of rules, by which

they proposed to fashion their lives. Thus they came to think themselves, and the common people came to think them, the best men on the earth, the best that could be. And yet these men came to be baptized. John knew very well that, from the very system by which they lived, they could have no proper sense of sin, and could exercise no true repentance. So he was not willing to receive them on a mere oral profession of repentance, but required them to pass through a sort of probation to prove by their lives that they were truly repentant and reformed men.

8. He would have them show by their acts that they had truly repented of their evil deeds, their hypocrisy, and other things, before he would baptize them. John was not anxious for numbers. He did not care to count a great number of those baptized, unless they were true recipients of his message. In this he was an example to some modern preachers.

9. It was a common thought among the Jews that no son of Abraham could be finally lost. There were many promises that the "children of Abraham" should be saved; but while they thought of the physical and earthly seed, the promises were to those who, by faith in God, such as Abraham exercised, gave evidence of being his children, or of the same race with him. The owner of the vineyard has even gone so far as to bring the axe and lay it down by the tree, ready to cut it down as soon as it may become evident that it is not going to bear good fruit. Not simply fruit, but "good fruit" is required; and the soul which does not bring it forth is cut off in its sin and consigned to the burning, "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched."

10. It is evident that John did not baptize men "in order that they might repent," but "because they had repented."

Repentance comes first and baptism afterward; that is the Scripture order. He who was standing in the midst of those mightier than John was the Lord Jesus, who soon after received the same baptism. He was mightier than John, and his baptism would be with the Holy Spirit and fire.

11. The purifier has the implement of his business always with him. The figure is changed from fire to the fan, and he is represented now as one who winnows grain, tossing it up so that the wind may carry away all the chaff and foul stuff. He will take good care of the wheat, the good grain; but he will have no use for the chaff, except to burn it, and that he will not fail to do.

IN THE HEART.

If no kindly thought or word
We can give, some soul to bless;
If our hands, from hour to hour,
Do no "seeds of gentleness;
If to lone and weary ones
We no comfort will impart—
Tho' 'tis summer in the sky
Yet 'tis winter in the heart!

If we strive to lift the gloom
From a dark and burdened life;
If we seek to lull the storm
Of our fallen brother's strife;
If we bid all hate and scorn
From the spirit to depart—
Tho' 'tis winter in the sky
Yet 'tis summer in the heart!

Oh, blessed thought! My sorrows
numbered by the Man of Sorrows;
my tears counted by Him who shed
first His tears, and then His blood
for me. He will impose no needless
burden, and exact no unnecessary
sacrifice.

That other side we shall see how
every rough blast has hastened our
bark to the desired haven.

THE INEVITABLE GOD.

By Rev. John Woods, D. D.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews remarks, that all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of God. But instead of using the word "God," or "the Lord," he substitutes the expression, "him with whom we have to do." The thought is an arresting and impressive one. God is a being with whom we have to do. Doubtless there are many beings in the universe to whom we stand in no necessary relation: If there are inhabitants on the planet Mars, we have nothing to do with them, and they have nothing to do with us. There are no duties or obligations arising from the fact of their existence. But God is a being with whom we all have to do, and with whom we always have to do. He is the inevitable, unescapable, unavoidable God. We have to do with him as our Maker. He is the framer of our bodies, and the father of our spirits. We have to do with him as our moral ruler and final judge.

There are two kinds of atheism in the world. There is the intellectual and speculative atheism which says there is no God, and there is the much more common, practical atheism that shuts God out of human life, and ignores his claim upon us. The great mass of mankind have an intellectual belief in God, but they keep him at a distance. The description of the wicked is, that God is not in all their thoughts. They live from day to day without any habitual reference to him in their actions and conduct. They never ask themselves whether the things which they do will be pleasing to God or not. But if we have any true conception of God at all, we must believe in his providence over us, and our moral responsibility to him. These are the necessary postulates of all religion.

Then why not face the facts, and "set right with God?" Since there is no possibility of escape in the final outcome, is it not the part of wisdom to acquaint ourselves with God at once, and be at peace with him? Sometime, somewhere, we shall have to do with God, and nothing is gained by delay. —Herald and Presbyter.

PRAYER.

Almighty Father, we would grow in wisdom; in understanding we would be men; in all things evil we would be as children, having no understanding of them or liking for them. We would be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. We pray for solidity of character, massiveness of manhood,—the great and complete nature which finds its rest in God's own peace, and its heaven in God's continual smile. Help us to grow that we may grow, and so to live that we may come to perfection of being in Christ Jesus. He died for us. We remember His going unto death; we see Him bearing His cross; we watch Him as He is nailed to the accursed tree; we see the Son of God in His last agony; we wonder why the uplifted cross, why the cry of pain and orphanhood, why the darkness and all the wonders that accompanied the crucifixion; when lo! we see written in the darkness, as with stars set in their places by the hand Divine: God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. This is the explanation of all: it satisfies the imagination; it comforts the heart; it appeases the conscience; it reconciles the whole nature unto God. Amen.

Respectability is sometimes that peculiar deference that society pays to public opinion.

S.S. Lesson, Jan. 2, Matt. 3:1-12.
Golden Text.—"The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Matt. 3:3).