

THE BIBLE CLASS.

PETER AND JOHN IN THE TEMPLE.

(Acts iii.—For Sunday Jan. 31st.)*

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After the extraordinary scenes of Pentecost the Church in Jerusalem enjoyed a season of rapid growth both inwardly and outwardly. The piety and devotion of its members, their mutual love, and the purity of their lives were such as to commend them greatly to popular favor. Day by day converts were made until presently the number had increased to about five thousand souls.

THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN.

This happy condition lasted several months, possibly a year¹ without any event of marked importance occurring to disturb the peace and joy of the Church. The jealousy and hatred of priests and rulers seemed to be dormant, for they made no sign that they were aware of what was taking place in the religious life of the capital. But an entirely unforeseen event quickly changed all this. As Peter and John according to their daily custom were entering the temple to offer prayer, a beggar asked an alms. The man was forty years of age, a deformed and helpless cripple who had been laid at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to seek charity from those who were passing in to thank God for the blessings they themselves enjoyed. Instead of giving him silver or gold, which they had none, Peter took him by the hand and commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ to rise and walk. How could Peter venture to do this? Because, being filled with the Holy Ghost, he spoke from a divine impulse. That the power of the risen Christ was operative through him was seen at once, for the helpless cripple arose, seized the hands of both his benefactors and entered with them into the temple, "walking, leaping, and praising God."

PETER'S ADDRESS IN THE TEMPLE.

This occurrence so extraordinary quickly drew a crowd of curious people about the Apostles and the well known man who had been healed. In an age peculiarly superstitious, and when miracle-mongers abounded on every hand, the people naturally took the Apostles for members of the same craft, and were astonished at their power. Peter instantly apprehended the feeling, and, disclaiming the power attributed to him, he seized the opportunity to declare the true Source of that power by which the impotent man had been healed. In so doing he presented the claims, dignity, and nature of Jesus whom the Jewish rulers had put to death, but whom God had proved to be the Messiah by raising Him from the dead and by showing forth through Him the power by which this man was healed. This great truth of the Messiahship of Jesus Peter thereupon applied to his Jewish hearers, who as sons of the prophets might properly be expected to rejoice above all other men in the fulfillment of that great hope of which the prophets had spoken.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MIRACLE.

Since this lesson has to do with the miracle itself rather than with its historical consequences, we note that it typifies the relation of Christianity to human suffering. As the priest and the Levite passed by on the other side without assisting the man who had fallen among thieves, so the great world-religions ignore as far as they can the woes which they can neither understand nor alleviate. Moreover, as the beggar was unable to heal himself, and as he well knew that no human power could work physical perfection in him, so humanity is helpless and hopeless, in view of the universal ruin attendant upon sin. Looking for no release from pain in this world men welcome any temporary alleviation in the hope that death mayhap will open the door to fairer worlds. Into the midst of these bruised and perishing generations of earth, groaning under poverty and oppression, hunger and famine, disease and pestilence, carnage and war, Christianity comes like an angel of God. She looks all this terrible story of human woe in the face and dares to speak not only of hope for another world, but of help for this. Christianity knows that sorrow answers to sin as face answers to face in the glass. Therefore she does not seek to mitigate merely the external want and misery that are laid at her feet, but to cure the deep-seated inward malady from which outward evils spring. As the abundance of spiritual power in the Apostles overflowed upon the helpless beggar, so the fulness of divine energy operates through Christianity for the redemption of mankind. Christianity contemplates nothing less than the redemption of the entire man, soul and body, for this world as well as for the world to come.

When Jesus sent forth His disciples to preach He committed to them the twofold Gospel of spiritual salvation and of physical healing. We may not be able to summon to our aid miraculous agencies as did the disciples, but we are not therefore left without resources. Because a spirit of world-wide sympathy and of loving helpfulness is still the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity, the earth blossoms in her path with hospitals, asylums, schools for the deaf and blind, homes for the aged and infirm, and charities in a thousand forms for the relief of every phase of human suffering. All the resources of science and civilization are drawn upon for aid.

But if these philanthropies, beautiful and noble as they are, were the only measures by which Christianity attempts to alleviate the woes and wretchedness of the world, the relief would be small indeed. It is because Christianity does not work at the circumference merely but in the heart, because it seeks to replace sin by holiness, that it is able to guarantee to the individual and to the race the realization of a condition in which the ruinous consequences of sin shall be overcome and displaced by the beneficent fruits of righteousness. In thus purifying and sweetening life at its source, it gladdens, brightens and glorifies all the outgoings of life. Destroying evil at the root is better than miracles for undoing its full development and accumulated effects.

FOR THE SABBATH SCHOOL.

International S. S. Lesson.

LESSON V.—THE BOLDNESS OF PETER AND JOHN.—JANUARY 31.

(Acts iv. 1-14.)

GOLDEN TEXT:—"There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."—(Acts iv. 12.)

TIME AND PLACE.—A. D. 30. Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION.—The present lesson begins in the temple, where the last closed, and where the great meeting was held in Solomon's porch. The two Apostles are arrested and pass the night in prison, probably in some cell of the temple cloisters. On the morrow they are called before the Sanhedrim, or great council of the Jews, to answer the charge preferred against them, and in their presence Peter boldly preaches the Gospel.

VERSE BY VERSE.—V. 1. "They."—The Apostles, Peter and John. "Captain of the temple."—The head of the temple guard which preserved order in the temple. "Sadducees."—One of the Jewish sects who rejected the doctrine of the resurrection. "Come upon them."—To arrest them.

V. 2. "Grieved."—Used here in the sense of vexed or offended. "Preached . . . the resurrection."—They had declared that Jesus had risen from the dead.

V. 3. "Laid hands on them."—Arrested them. Put them in prison. "Eventide."—It was three o'clock when they healed the lame man; it was now night.

V. 4. "Heard the word."—The word that Peter preached. "Believed."—On Jesus. "The number of the men."—This is generally understood as though the clause were added, "besides women and children." "About five thousand."—Whether this means that five thousand men were converted at this time, or that the disciples now numbered five thousand men, is uncertain. The latter is the probable interpretation.

V. 5. "Rulers, elders, etc."—It is intended to mean the classes that made up the Sanhedrim, or great council which was now assembled.

V. 6. "Annas, Caiaphas."—There are the same under whose leadership Jesus was tried and condemned. Annas was the lawful high priest, but Caiaphas, his son-in-law, had been made high priest by the Roman power. "John and Alexander."—Nothing is known of them, but they appear to have been relatives of Annas. "Gathered together."—Assembled in council.

V. 7. "Set them in the midst."—Brought the Apostles before the council. "By what power, etc."—They would have been glad to charge the Apostles with the use of sorcery. "Done this."—That is, healed the lame man.

V. 8. "Filled with the Holy Ghost."—He received a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost to meet this occasion.

V. 10. "By the name of Jesus."—That is, by the power of Jesus. "Whom ye crucified."—They do not hesitate boldly to bring this charge against the council.

V. 11. "The stone . . . set at naught."—Jesus despised and rejected. "Head of the corner."—The corner stone of God's home—His kingdom.

V. 12. "None other name, under heaven."—No other power on earth.

V. 13. "The boldness."—Used in the sense of confidence in their cause and in their message. "Took knowledge of them."—

*An Exposition of Lesson 5 in *The Bible Study Union Sunday School Lessons* on "The Three Great Apostles."