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THE Teachers' Preparation Leaflet

LESSON 9.

DECEMBER 2nd, 1894.

4th QUARTER.

Christ's Testimony to John. LUKE 7: 24-35.

(Commit to memory verses 27-28.)

GOLDEN TEXT,

"Behold I send my messenger before thy face." Luke 7: 27.

PROVE THAT

We are to be witnesses for Christ. Acts 1: 8.

SHORTER CATECHISM.

Quest. 104. *What is we pray for in the fourth petition?* A. In the fourth petition (which is, *Give us this day our daily bread*), we pray, That of God's free gift we may receive a competent portion of the good things of this life, and enjoy his blessing with them.

LESSON HYMNS.

CHILDREN'S HYMNAL Nos. 7, 218, 27, 31.

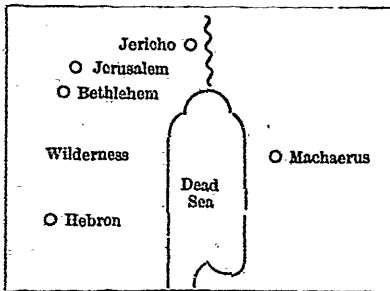
DAILY PORTIONS.

(The Selections of the I. B. R. A.)

MONDAY—Christ's Testimony to John. — Luke 7: 24-35.
TUESDAY—Testimony of the People. Matt. 21: 23-32.
WEDNESDAY—Herod's Testimony. Mark 6: 14-20.
THURSDAY—Great in the Sight of the Lord. Luke 1: 5-17.
FRIDAY—The Forerunner. Luke 1: 67-80.
SATURDAY—The Voice. Matt. 3: 1-12.
SABBATH—A Shining Light. John 5: 31-38.

NOTES AND EXPLANATIONS.

INTRODUCTORY. About four months before the date of our lesson, Herod Antipas had seized John and imprisoned him in the lonely fortress of Machaerus, situated about nine miles east of the northern end of the Dead Sea (see map). The reason for his doing so is given in Matt. 14: 3-5. During this period Jesus was engaged in preaching and healing throughout Galilee. The incidents which gave rise to the words contained in our lesson occurred shortly after the miracle at Nain (ch. 7: 11-17). Pining in his lonely dungeon John seems to have craved some reassuring word from Christ, and accordingly set to him two of his disciples to ask him, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" In reply, Jesus bade the messengers tell John what wonders they saw and heard. The recital of these, more than



any mere assurance from His lips, would cheer the discouraged prophet. Parallel passage, Matt. 11: 7-19.

LESSON PLAN. Christ Commending John. vs. 24-28. II. Christ Condemning the People. vs. 29-35.

I. CHRIST COMMENDING JOHN. 24. The messengers—the two disciples who had been sent to inquire "Art thou he that should come?" Our Saviour hastens to remove the unfavorable impression which John's apparent doubt of his Messiahship may have occasioned, and to restore confidence in him notwithstanding that he was now, overshadowed by the greater popularity

of himself, languishing in a tyrant's prison. The wilderness—the district between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea, where John had been brought up (Luke 1: 80), and where he began his ministry (Matt. 3: 1). A reed—"The reed of Egypt and Palestine is a very tall cane, growing twelve feet high, with a magnificent panicle of blossoms at the top, and so slender and yielding that it

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will be perfectly flat under a gust of wind, and immediately resume its upright position. It grows in great canobreaks in many parts of Palestine, especially on the west side of the Dead Sea, where, nourished by the warm springs, it lines the shore for several miles with an impenetrable fringe—the lair of wild boars and leopards—to the exclusion of all other vegetation. On the banks of the Jordan it occurs in great patches but not so lofty. (Canon Tristram) John was not a fickle, changeable man, veering with every turn of the wind of popularity. He neither catered to the public for applause, nor truckled to the king for patronage. He was a man of dauntless courage, inflexible resolution and fearless tongue.

25. Soft raiment—He reminds them of the camel's hair coat and leathern girdle which John wore, and the locusts and wild honey on which he fared (Matt. 3: 4) There is an implied contrast with the effeminate courtiers of Herod, thus arousing feelings of respect and admiration for John. Live delicately—live in luxury, referring to the whole mode of life. The word is from a verb which means to enervate by debauchery and excess. **Kings' courts**—The Herods had palaces at Tiberias, Cæsarea Philippi and Jerusalem.

26. Much more than a prophet—John was the only prophet whose coming had been predicted (Mal. 3: 1); others merely foretold the coming of Christ, he actually pointed him out (John 1: 29); and he was in immediate personal relation to Christ as his Forerunner, preparing the people to listen to his teachings (John 3: 26-36).

27. Of whom it is written—(Mal. 3: 1; Isa. 40: 3; Luke 1: 15-17, 76). In Malachi the words are "before me," and God is the speaker. Christ was therefore Immanuel, God manifest in human nature. Matthew tells us that Jesus told them further that John was the Elijah who was to come (Mal. 4: 5; compare Luke 7: 17) **Prepare the way**—On every occasion of the visit of a prince, whether native or a foreign visitor, it is the custom to send official messengers to impress laborers and put the highways in travelling order. It was done, for instance, in several cases, when the Grand Duke of Russia, father of the recently deceased Czar, visited the East. The highways are usually mere tracks, which would not, in this country, be recognized as roads, or hardly as Indian trails, and yet they are the avenues of an immense commerce. But much work is needed to make the way tolerable for the passage of a prince and his escort. (Dr. I. H. Hall.)

28. Born of women—a general description of mankind (Job 14: 1). Compare Gal. 4: 4. Our Saviour's true humanity is

expressed in this way. **He that is but little in the kingdom of heaven** (R. V.)—By "kingdom of heaven," the spiritual kingdom which Christ founded, is meant. Those who are "but little" or "lesser," "inferior," in that kingdom are **Greater than he**—"Not greater in personal character nor in external condition, but in present privilege, prerogative, station as the least child is greater than the highest servant." (Abbott.) He is greater in respect to the development of his knowledge, spiritual insight and experience. The humblest Christian knows more about Christ than John did; enjoys more of the Holy Spirit, for He applies to him the benefits purchased by Christ; John was a servant, though a prophet he is a son (Rom 8: 14-17); and, in fine, he belongs to a new and brighter era in the history of redemption. In Matthew's account Christ goes on to say that multitudes thronged around John like a besieging army entering, pouring into, a captured city. When John came the prophetic dispensation ended and the new era dawned. For John was the Elijah of which Malachi spoke.

II. CHRIST CONDEMNING THE PEOPLE. 29. It is not quite clear whether verses 29 and 30 were spoken by Christ, or are a comment by the evangelist. In favor of the former view is the fact that the words "and the Lord said," in verse 31, are spurious, and there is no such break in the continuity of the subject; the words come naturally in connection with the verses in Matthew regarding the thronging crowds just referred to; and there is no other example of a similar interpolation by Luke. On the other hand the tone of the verses is so much calmer than the preceding words of Jesus, that they strike the ear more naturally as a comment of Luke himself. Good authorities are about equally divided in their opinions on this point. We adopt the latter view. All the people—(Mark 12: 37.) Christ's poor in contrast with the pharisees and lawyers. These had accepted John's preaching, and prepared their hearts by repentance to receive Christ. **Justified God**—declared that God's plan for saving men was the right one, and so they readily submitted to Christ's teaching (Matt. 3: 5; Luke 3: 12). They came to Christ as having a right to the allegiance they had formerly given their imprisoned master.

30. Rejected for themselves (R. V.)—frustrated, as far as they were concerned, the counsel of God. God's plan was that by repenting of sin and accepting Christ, they should enter the kingdom of God. They refused John, and so would not now come to Jesus. They were too proud and self-righteous to submit to the humbling doctrines of either. "*Frustrated by words and deeds God's way of salvation in their own cases* (Gal.

2: 21). Man cannot foil God's plan for the world, but he may render it vain for himself" (Lindsay.) This explanation of the evangelist prepares us for the charge of inconsistency which Christ now lays against them.

31. Like unto children—This is the only place in the Bible where children's games are mentioned (compare Zech. 8: 5). They seem to have been playing at "wedding" and "funeral." One group complains that, do what they will, the others "won't play right." At the wedding they won't dance and at the funeral they won't wail. So, Christ says, the Pharisees disliked the searching rebukes of John, for they did not feel that they were sinners; and they hated still more his own gracious teaching, for it set no value upon their heartless, formal ceremonies. They said that John was possessed with a devil, and that Jesus was a bad man. "The sense of the comparison is, ye are like a band of wayward children, who go on with their own game, at one time gay at another grave, and give no heed to any one else, and expect every one should conform to them. You were angry at John because he would not dance to your piping, and with me because I will not weep to your dirge. John censured your licentiousness, I your hypocrisy; you, therefore, vilify both, and 'reject the good counsel of God, who has devised a variety of means for your salvation (Luke 7: 30)." (Wordsworth.) We have piped—played on a pipe, an instrument somewhat resembling a flageolet. We have

mourned—R. V. "we wailed," after the fashion of hired mourners at a funeral.

33. Eating no bread nor drinking wine (R. V.)—living a hermit's life, and dining on locusts and wild honey. Every day was a fast day with him (Luke 18: 12). His ascetic mode of life was displeasing to the courtiers and Sadducees, and his fearless rebuke of sin offended the self-righteous. Eating and drinking—His first miracle supplied the lack of wine at a wedding feast (John 2: 2). He accepted invitations to the tables of the rich (Luke 7: 36; John 12: 2), and we never read of his fasting, or of his disciples doing so; but he derided them in not fasting (Matt. 9: 15.). A friend of publicans and sinners—(Luke 15: 2; 19: 7). It was not true that Jesus ate and drank to excess, or that he companied with bad people because he was bad himself. But it is true that Jesus made himself a friend and companion of all so that he might turn them from sin to himself. The words they spoke in scorn are his proudest title now—"The Sinner's Friend."

35. Wisdom—divine wisdom. Prov. 8 and 9; 1 Cor. 1: 23, 24. Justified of all her children—The children of wisdom are the divinely wise, the spiritually-minded, "of" whom, or "at the hands of" whom, God's plan is approved. Those who, like the pharisees and lawyers, "resist the counsel of God," show thereby that they are not God's children.

SUMMARY AND REVIEW.

Languishing in the prison fortress of Machaerus, John the Baptist craved some new assurance from Jesus that he was indeed the Christ. He was still a prophet of the old dispensation, and looked for such a Messiah as most Jews expected. But Jesus did not seem to come up to this idea. He gave no sign of purging with his "fan" and burning up the chaff. Gloomy thoughts, arising largely from his confinement and inactivity, arose in his mind. Might he not have been mistaken? Might not Jesus only be another prophet like himself, but holier, who heralded the advent of Messiah. Surely Jesus himself would know. He would send and ask him. Accordingly he sent two of his disciples, asking him, "Art thou the Coming One, or is He yet to come?" The answer of Jesus shews that he fully understood John's state of mind. He did not upbraid him for wavering faith, nor enter into a discussion of Scripture, as he did on the way to Emmaus on the afternoon of his resurrection, nor curtly answer "I am," leaving John to rest his trembling soul upon a simple assertion, thus to try his faith still more; but he bade the messengers, "Look!" "Listen!" "Tell!" Picture to John what they saw, and let him hear the "gracious words" spoken. His own faithful heart would do the rest. And he gave him a benediction, "Blessed is he who shall find no stumbling block in me."

When the messengers had departed Christ commended John to the people in vivid, dramatic eloquence. He spoke of no one else in such high terms. John he declared to be the greatest man that had ever lived. Yet, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he added, "Nevertheless the humblest of my followers is greater than he." In what respect is this true?

Than John there was No Greater in Character. No bending reed, yielding to every popular demand, but a sturdy oak or immovable rock, who planted himself firmly for

righteousness and purity of life. No silk-clad courtier fawning upon Herod, but one who told soldiers and sadducees, priests and Pharisees, yes, even Herod and Herodias themselves, to their faces, their sins, and compelled respect for his camel's hair coat and leathern girdle. No greater than Job, in Office. He was the only prophet who had been himself the subject of prophecy. Others had foretold the Messiah, he pointed him out with his finger. He was the Forerunner who announced that the kingdom of God was at hand, and prepared the way in the hearts of men for the reception of His words. With him the "goodly fellowship of the prophets" was completed. No greater than John in Influence. In Matthew's account of these words Jesus compares the crowds that flocked around John to the rush of a victorious army into a captured city. The fallow ground was broken up by John into which Christ sowed the seed.

The Humblest Christian is Greater than John in Knowledge—Our Sabbath School scholars know more about Christ than he did. We have seen Calvary and its Cross. We have read the New Testament. We have nearly 1900 years of Christian experience to teach us. **In Privileges**—We live in the dispensation of the Spirit. In the brighter light of the gospel. **In Sonship**—"Beloved now are we the sons of God." The Spirit bears witness to our filial relation to God through Christ. Great though John was he was but in a servant's place, he had not attained to the standing of those who are "joint heirs with Christ."

If John was so great why did not the people recognize his greatness? Because they were fickle-minded. They rejected him for the same reason that they rejected Christ. Some **Justified God**, accepting his way of salvation, testing his worth, and proving its efficacy to give peace to the soul. These were the **Humble**, the **Penitent**, the **Wise**, whom heavenly wisdom had enlightened. Others **Rejected God**, frustrating his plan so far as they were concerned. These were the **Self-Righteous**, the **Insincere**, the **Worldly**. Illustrate these classes and apply their obvious lessons

BLACKBOARD HINTS.

By GEO. H. ARCHIBALD, Superintendent of St. Matthew's S. S., Montreal, Que.

— CHRIST'S TESTIMONY TO JOHN. —

John



Jesus

Jesus



John

WHEN

DUTY CALLS
DOUBT COMES
DANGER IS NEAR

POINT
LOOK
TRUST

TO JESUS

Ten Minutes Normal Drill:

based on the text-book, "The Sabbath School Teacher's Handbook; or, the Principles and Practice of Teaching, with special reference to the Sabbath School," and prepared by Principal Kirkland of the Toronto Normal School.

TELLING AND QUESTIONING. (CHAPTER VII.)

(Continued.)

IV. Manner of Putting a Question.

1. State the question to the whole class, and ask *one* to answer.
2. Simultaneous questions may be used with young pupils.
3. Important questions should be asked in a variety of ways.

V. Tests of a Good Answer.

1. It should be full and complete.
2. It should be given in the form of a sentence.