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THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1872.

ELISHA AND ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, May 5th, 1872.

The boy restored to life.—2 Kings iv. 29-37.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“The hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice.” John iv. 28.

SCRIPTURE SELECTION.—Hebrews xi. 1-6; 24-40.

SUMMARY.—Not the staff's magic influence, not Elisha's own power, but God, in approval of the mother's faith, in answer to his prophet's prayer, for a sign to his people, raised to life the dead boy.

ANALYSIS.—I. The preparation. vs. 29-32.

II. The resurrection. vs. 33-35.

III. The reunion. vs. 36-37.

EXPOSITION.—The needed link.—The last lesson closed with vs. 26, the present begins with vs. 29, but we must not lose sight of the two verses between.

The bereaved mother pressed on to the prophet, fell prostrate before him as in the East subjects were wont to do before rulers, and took him by the feet in token of earnest supplication. See Matt. xxviii. 9. This was so contrary to her custom that Gehazi interfered, not understanding the cause. But Elisha though he knew not what troubled her, yet knew that she was in great distress, and had come to him for relief; that he was to her, in a certain sense, in the place of God.

Hence his rebuke of his servant. Notice too, how he refers all his superior wisdom to God. “God hath hid it.” The prophets, unlike Jesus, had not in their own persons anything supernatural. Notice next in vs. 28 how much of her heart the woman reveals in a few words: The word “son” shows what has happened.

Verse 29.—The command to Gehazi. Elisha seems to have assented promptly to her request. While his interest in her and her family inclined him to this, he certainly would not, could not have done it merely from the promptings of friendship, and without the express direction of God's Spirit within him.

God's servants are guided not by their personal presences, but by their Lord's will. We now take up the particulars of the command. (1) “Gird up thy loins.” The loins were “the lower part of the back.” The loose, flowing, outer-garment most comfortable and easy for rest or moderate movement when ungirded, was a hindrance in swift motion and in active labor, unless tightly girded about the body.

Gehazi was to go a long distance and with speed. How forceful the expression, “Gird up the loins of the mind.” Be ready for mental conflict and action. (2) “Take my staff in hand, go thy way.” As appears farther on, the staff was given not to aid in walking, but to lay on the child. The prophet seems at this time to have purposed to remain, and to secure the child's restoration without going to it.

Why did he send the staff and not the mantle of Elijah? Or why send either or anything? Miracles were wrought for signs, chiefly for great spiritual ends. Jesus Christ in his own person was the miracle of miracles, and all wrought either in the old or the new dispensation were to give his gospel place in the world.

Hence they were to be connected with the servants of God, to attest their heavenly mission, and, if the servant was not present in person, it was natural that he should be represented by something belonging to him. The staff, rather than the mantle, may have been given partly because of the great value of the mantle, and the consequent unwillingness to trust it with another, and partly for convenience.

The staff with the Orientals was a badge of authority. A king's sceptre was originally a staff. Hence the staff was the symbol of its possessor's authority, as was the signet ring. See Gen. xxxviii. 18; Isa. lxi. 1; Ex. iv. 17, 20; vii. 9, 20; Num. xvii. 8. Hence the prophet's staff was a fit thing to send by his servant.

(3) Salute no one. “The Orientals were very exact in the observances of outward decorum, and their salutations and expressions of regard on meeting each other were extremely tedious.” Hence when urgent haste was needed the formalities had to be disregarded. Compare Christ's command in Luke x. 4. It was given to save time.

It was no violation of courtesy to attend to pressing duties rather than to meaning-

less formalities. (4) “Lay my staff upon the face of the child,” in order, as we just saw, to connect the miracle with the prophet. Elisha knew that neither he, nor his mantle, nor his staff, had any power apart from God. So let us remember that not in church, or ordinances, or persons, or prayers, or any such thing is there divine efficiency. God is all in all.—Christ is the sole fountain of life. “By my Spirit, saith the Lord.”

Verse 30.—Gehazi starts, but the mother stays. She will not leave the prophet, and to this effect makes oath. Her faith could not rise to the point of Elisha's. She did not believe the boy would, could be raised unless the prophet was present in person. And note here God's kindness. He adjusts himself to her faith and now shows the prophet that not by the staff, but by his personal presence the lad will be restored. He does not refuse the request because faith is weak, but accommodates himself to its weakness, giving “according to the faith.”

So is it ever,—the Saviour may be grieved that we trust him so feebly, but he does not despise even the feeble trust. More trust would bring richer blessing,—but any trust will bring a rich blessing.

Verse 31.—A solemn hour! Elisha alone with death and God! He shuts the door, for the profane eye of curiosity, even the love-anxious eye of the mother, must not peer in to distract his thoughts.

Elisha prayed. He knew that God had the keys of death and the grave, that nature's laws were not above the Creator's will. Oh, for more of that faith! To bring the personal God near to the mind and heart. We need it to live by, we will need it to die by.

Verse 32.—Why these acts of the prophet? Krummacher writes, “It is as though he said, ‘Oh Lord, I and this child are one, I cannot let the boy go. Either permit him to share life with me, or permit me to share the grave with him. If it is thy will, O Lord, that thy servant should walk longer upon the earth,—awake this dead body, for I am dead with him. If it is thy will to leave him in death's hand, thou hast pronounced a sentence of death over me, thy servant, for I cannot separate myself from this dead body.’

Behold this was the meaning of the prophet's singular conduct.” Compare the account in 1 Kings xvii. 20, 21. Whatever may be the true explanation of the prophet's acts, it certainly is a false explanation that makes them merely natural means of restoration. Nothing could be more silly than such a pretended exposition: Warmth returns to the body,—the result of restored life, the evidence that his prayer is heard. How instructive the mighty earnestness,—the great wrestlings of the prophet. It is such prayer that avails.

Verse 35.—He seems to walk as a brief rest from the exhausting struggle, but soon returns. The faint life in the child must be brought out to its fulness. He returns and after a like struggle the answer is given. The child comes to consciousness, and looks into the familiar face of the prophet. Did those who were called from death remember their experiences while “absent from the body”? There is no evidence that they did; it seems more likely that they did not; yet to affirm would be rash.

Verse 37.—He has the mother called. What an hour of waiting! What emotion when called. The prophet says, “Take up thy son,” he is yours again, in God's name I give him back. The Lord gave, the Lord took, and the Lord has restored. See how piety receives blessing. Not gladness, but thankfulness excels. Ought we to be less thankful that God spares our dear ones than we should be if he were to return them after death? “She took up her son, and went out.”

QUESTIONS.—Where did we leave the Shunammite at the close of the last lesson? vs. 25, 26. What did she say to the prophet? vs. 28. What did he bid Gehazi do? vs. 29. Could Elisha have wrought the miracle in his own power? Explain the phrase “Gird up thy loins?” Why this command? Why was the staff sent? Gen. xxxviii. 18; Ex. iv. 17; Comp. 2 Kings ii. 14. Why was Gehazi commanded to salute no one? Luke x. 4.

Who met Elisha and the mother? vs. 31. What did he say? Why do you suppose that God did not raise the child when the staff was laid on the face? What did Elisha do when he reached the house? vs. 33. Why should he shut the door? Mat. vi. 6. Was his prayer answered immediately? Can you see any reason for these acts? What is 1 Kings xvii. 21? What was the first sign of returning life in the child? vs. 34. What did the mother do when called? vs. 37. When will all rise from the dead?

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher's Scripture Catechism, 38, 39.

SUNDAY, May 12.—The Little Captive. 2 Kings 5: 1-7.

THE SABBATH SCHOOL CONCERT is one of the most pleasing features in connection with the recent developments of those institutions. Much depends however on the mode of conducting them as well as upon the pieces selected being suitable for recitation. We have seldom seen a more appropriate combination of scripture texts, and sacred poetry for this purpose, than in the following, from the S. S. Teacher on THE TREES OF THE BIBLE.

The Teacher or Superintendent should repeat the first stanza. Then one boy or girl recite the verse of poetry, and another one the text of scripture containing the answer thereto:

THE TREES OF THE BIBLE. Let us look through sacred story, Song, and psalm, until we see, In their beauty and their glory, Forms of many a fair green tree. Trees that shaded saints and sages; Trees that waved where prophets trod; Trees that lived through all the ages, In the changeless Word of God.

I. When the captives wept for Zion, For her power and glory gone, What fair tree, with drooping branches, Hung they their sad harp's upon?

ANS.—By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harp on the willows in the midst thereof.—Psalm cxxxvii: 1.

II. When the prophet sang the story Of her grandeur yet to be, Of her beauty and her glory, Spoke he then of any tree?

A.—The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary.—Isa. lx: 13.

III. When he gives the invitation, Come, ye thirsting, thirst no more, How, in joyful proclamation, Tells he of the good in store?

A.—Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.—Isa. lv: 13.

IV. What says he when men, forsaking God Most High, the living Lord, Out of wood their gods are making, That can never speak a word?

A.—He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengthened for himself, among the trees of the forest; he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. * * * He maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto.—Isa. xliv: 14-15.

V. On the hills and mountains, burning Incense unto gods thus made, Israel, far from Zion turning, Sought what trees' most pleasant shade?

A.—They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountain, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks, and poplars, and elms, because the shadow thereof is good.—Hos. iv: 13.

VI. When another prophet telleth Of God's judgments falling fast, While his heart with sorrow swelleth, How speaks he of the glories past?

A.—The vine is dried up, and the fig-tree languisheth; the pomegranate-tree, even all the trees of the field are withered; because joy is withered away from the sons of men.—Joel ii: 12.

VII. After words of solemn warning For the people in their sins, Then what hope, like gleams of dawning, Through the prophet's voice flows in?

A.—But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return and shall be eaten: as a teil-tree, and as an oak whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be as the substance thereof.—Isa. vi: 13.

VIII. Unto Israel returning, Hear the promise of his Lord; God, to his dear children yearning, Speaks to them what tender word?

A.—I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the hly, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree.—Joel xiv: 5, 6.

IX. When God called the weeping prophet, When he said, What dost thou see? Lifting up his eyes, what saw he? Blooming branch of what fair tree?

A.—Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Jeremiah, what

seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond-tree.—Jer. i: 11.

X. When Elijah's spirit failed him, And he asked that he might die, When the angel touched and hailed him, Neath what tree did Elijah lie?

A.—But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die.—1 Kings xix: 4.

XI. When the Lord directed David Out to battle when to go, O'er against what trees then said he, They should come upon the foe?

A.—Come upon them over against the mulberry-trees. And it shall be when thou shalt hear a sound of going in the tops of the mulberry-trees; that then thou shalt go out to battle.—1 Chron. xiv: 14, 15.

XII. What tree that now on Lebanon, In solemn beauty reigns, In the grand days of Solomon, Grew, like, upon the plains, Another tree, whose branches bore, In a far later day, Zacheus, who ran on before, When Jesus passed that way?

A.—And the king made silver in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar-trees made he as the sycamore-trees that are in the low plains in abundance.—11 Chron. ix: 27. And he (Zacheus) ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore-tree to see him, for he was to pass that way.—Luke xix: 4.

XIII. What trees that Hiram sent with gold From far across the seas, Made terraces, as we are told, And harps, and psalteries?

A.—And the king made of the algum-tree terraces to the house of the Lord, and to the king's palace; and harps and psalteries for singers.—11 Chron. ix: 11.

XIV. And now what tree, more fair than all, May priests and prophets see, And yet its leaves and fruit may fall To bless both you and me?

A.—And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and in either side of the river, was there the tree of life which bare twelve manner of fruits and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.—Rev. xxii: 1, 2.

NAMES OF THE TREE.—Willow, Fir, Pine, Box, Myrtle, Cedar, Cypress, Oak, Ash, Poplar, Fig, Pomegranate, Palm, Apple, Teal, Olive, Almond, Juniper, Sycamore, Algum, Thorn, Mulberry. For description of the trees, see “Kitto's Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature.”

Youths' Department.

HIDDEN DANGER. A feathery flutter! With wondrous eyes, I gazed at my window in gladsome surprise. A little brown birdie was beating the pane, As asking to enter my cozy domain.

Yes, yes, little birdie, it was very snug, With gay colored carpet, and soft Persian rug.

And flowers and pictures and books and all that, But one thing you saw not, and that was the cat.

So if I had heeded your innocent plea, What terror and anguish for both you and me!

Then fly away, birdie, remembering well, In granted petitions great danger may dwell; And you, my dear children, remember it, too, For peril may lurk where there seems none to you.

And when you are asking for this or for that, Just think of the birdie who saw not the cat.

AMONG THE PLANTS. Surely it would be a great wonder to a boy who owns marbles, if some day he should find that one of them had burst open, and a tiny house sprung up within!

Still stranger would it be if this house should grow larger and higher, till it should become a factory with its many looms, and its vast and curious machinery fitted for manufacturing wool or cotton into cloth.

It would recall to mind the famous days when faires were said to haunt the woodlands and mountains, and by a stroke of their magical wand turn dewdrops to diamonds, and do many other marvelous things.

Of course we do not believe in faires, but wonders great as any of these are going on constantly before our eyes, and it is only

because they are so common that we think so little about them. There are, but very few things that we eat or wear, that have not been produced, in part or altogether, in these manufactories all around us that have grown up from little dull looking seeds.

Last spring the farmers and gardeners were very busy. They sowed fields of wheat and oats, and planted corn and potatoes, peas and beets, and in the flower-beds bulbs were set out and seeds sown.

And how it was we cannot tell—it is one of God's mysteries that the wisest men cannot fathom—but after a while life began to stir in the little seeds, and pretty soon tiny roots pierced through the ground, and the fields and gardens grew green and beautiful.

Just as the planter expected they came up; the corn, the grass, the lilies and gladioli sent up their spear-like single leaf, while the beans, the balsams, and asters had two leaves at first, thus marking in the beginning of their growth the two great divisions of flowering plants.

Why was it that the grain of corn did not send up a “little sprouting oak tree,” or the bean a slender blade of grass? or why did they sprout and grow at all? Is it not because everything is planned and controlled by One who is all-powerful and all-wise? We know they would not chance to come in this perfect order.

As the stem with its first leaves goes upward, the root goes downward in search of nourishment. Its fibres, like little threads, reach downward, and stretch out to gather up the moisture that is full of plant food.

And strange food it is. Water forms a large proportion of it, and dissolved in the water, lime, iron, sulphur, phosphorus, and other strange substances, that, taken up by the roots, and coursing through the stem and leaves, together with the air taken in by the leaves, make the nourishment it requires.

When the soil is poor, and the plants are growing small and weak, if the food they require is mixed with the soil around their roots, they will at once begin to thrive.

Besides bringing life to the stem and leaves, these busy workers are gathering up treasures in their underground storerooms. From them comes a variety of vegetables that add so much to our table comforts; some kinds of nuts, ginger, and roots used in medicine.

The value of these must amount to hundreds of millions of dollars yearly. Though out of sight underground, roots are not roughly formed, but just as perfect as any other part of the plant. There is no slighting in any part of God's handiwork.

In color, too, many of them may vie with flowers. The rich deep red, the pure white, the delicate rose, yellow, and purple, are not often surpassed.

There are many interesting things connected with plant life that we shall discover if we examine the root, the stem, the leaf, the flower, and fruit; and a great deal of beauty in the common things all around us, if we only use our eyes aright.—S. S. Advocate.

HOSPITALITY WITHOUT GRUDGING.

This morning a poor man came to our house to sell my father a cow. He had walked five miles through the snow, and looked very tired. He was sorry to part with his cow, but said they had all been sick this fall, and he was obliged to do so in order to get some food for the children through the winter.

He looked far from strong, and I pitied him. But my mother did more than that. She came into the kitchen, where I was paring potatoes for our dinner, and said: “Just wash your hands, Edith, and get out the little waiver; put a plate of biscuit on it, while I heat up this coffee; now you may put on a little plate of butter, a piece of mince-pie and some doughnuts. I will cut off some beef from the outside of this roast, as it is nice and brown. Now all is ready but the coffee, and that will boil in a minute or two over the hot coal fire. Take it now, and put it on the little stand before Mr. Weaver. I know it will do him good; I dare say they live poorly this hard winter.”

I felt sorry for the man, but it took my good mother to do all this for his comfort. She always offers refreshment to persons stopping here, whom she thinks would be the better for it. I never knew my mother's cupboard so empty that there was not something in it for the needy. I don't believe there is a poor child in the town who has not had cause to remember it one time or another. They like to come to our house on errands.