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BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1873.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, September 14th.

Jesus and John.—Matt. xi. 1-11.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. . . . He was a burning and a shining light." John v. 33, 35.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 2, 6.

SUMMARY.—Both Christ's words and works prove him to be the world's Redeemer, and the glory of his servants is their service.

ANALYSIS.—I. Introductory narrative. 1. 2. II. John's message. vs. 8. III. Christ's answer. vs. 4-6. IV. His defence of John. vs. 7-11.

EXPOSITION.—Introductory.—Chapter x, is wholly occupied with Christ's instructions to the twelve, given at the time of their special designation to the apostolic office. That appointment was said, in the last lesson, to mark the beginning of a new stage of his work and self-manifestation. We shall have disclosed to us from the beginning of this eleventh chapter, more and more clearly, the results of this manifestation upon different classes of people, both those of the kingdom and those within it; the unfavourable and the favourable results. Of the former we have the account in chapters xi-xiii; of the latter in chapters xiv-xviii.

Verse 1.—And it came to pass. This phrase often recurs, and is used to introduce the statement of some fact not very closely connected with the preceding narrative. Matthew here turns from the topic of the tenth chapter to a new topic. There he gave instruction to the heralds that are within the kingdom; here he receives and answers the message of the special herald who prepared the way for the coming of the kingdom. Had made an end of commanding, as in chap. x. We have also to supply the thought that the twelve had dispersed, probably two by two, on their assigned work. Then Christ departed thence, from the place where he had commissioned the twelve; did not remain at his ease, or wrap himself in a mystery of secrecy, but went out hither and thither among the people, linking himself to them, seeking them. To teach and to preach.—Not to the exclusion of doing "mighty works," Luke vii. "To preach," or herald, was the authoritative announcement of a message; "to teach," was to instruct the people as to the nature of the message and its bearing upon their interests and duties. Their cities: Whose cities? Some say the cities of the apostles; i. e., either where they were born, or where they had lived, or where they had now gone to preach and work miracles. May it not be rather the people's, the cities of those to whom he preached? He did not go to mountains, or country places, and wait for the people to come out to him, but he met them in their chief centres, just as his apostles were to do, just as his ministers now are to do—going to find them, not waiting for them to find him.

Verse 2.—In the prison. Where Herod Antipas had wickedly put him. Luke iii. 19, 20. This prison was "the castle of Machaerus, a fortress on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea." He seems not to have been kept in complete isolation. His disciples were allowed to visit him and comfort him, to bring tidings of Jesus Christ, and, in this case, to bear a message from John to him. Josephus (Antiq., Book XVIII. 5, 2) says that John was put into this fortress by Herod, because Herod feared that with his power over the people he might raise a rebellion. The privileges given John accord better with the Scripture account of the reason. The works of Christ. Not merely his miracles, but, in general, his doings, his whole course. There was much in this course that was perplexing not only to John the Baptist, but even till after the resurrection, to those who were Christ's constant attendants, and, indeed, to his chosen apostles. And especially perplexing to John would be Christ's free and familiar intercourse with all classes, so contrary of John's habits. vs. 16-19. His disciples. For not till long after this did the disciples of John understand that Jesus and John were not two masters, but that Jesus alone was Master, and John only his servant and their fellow-servant. Acts xix. 3, 4.

Verse 3.—Said unto him. Speaking for

John, giving his message, asking his question in his name. Art thou he that should come, or look we for another? Christ was the expected One. From man's fall in Eden, the eyes of the race had been directed forward to the coming great One who was to help and save. Such passages as Psalm xl. 7: cviii. 26; Mal. iii. 1, may have served to fix upon him more definitely the title of the Coming One. The Cross is at the centre of the world's history. Before its erection all eyes were, or should have been, turned forward toward it. Since its erection all eyes are, or should be, turned backward toward it. And yet still Christ is for us the coming One, for he is to "appear a second time without sin unto salvation."

Verse 4.—Go and show John. He gives no rebuke. It would have been most unlike our Lord, quite impossible for him to meet John, or any other soul, in such a trouble, otherwise than with words of loving help, and helping love. It is to just such troubles that he most readily sends or brings the kind relief. Those things which ye do see and hear. Nothing other in kind than John already knew about; for he knew, by report, that such works were done, but the old facts were to come and meet him in a new way, fresh, and on the testimony of his own friends, and with a word of kind cheer, right from the Lord's lips and heart.

Verse 5.—These words would naturally be recognized not only as a description of the events, but as the words of Isaiah, in describing the works of Messiah; and, hence, as the signs and proof of his manifestations. Isa. xxxv. 5; lxi. 1. The nature of Christ's works, and the fact that just these were predicted as distinctively his works, both together, formed the argument. Not only Christ's power, but his goodness, is shown in these miracles. The Gospel was preached to the poor, but not to them alone.

Verse 6.—Blessed is he, etc.; intended to meet John's state of mind, and to act at once as a gentle warning, and a kind encouragement. It intimates that he is not blessed, but the opposite, who is so offended as to break company with Christ, reject his Gospel, and disown his cause. Our word scandal is from the Greek word here translated offended. Hence the word "scandal," by its derivation, means something put in the path of another to make him fall down, and thus come into his enemy's power.

Verse 7.—As they departed. Immediately. What went ye out into the wilderness to see? Addressed to the multitude, most of whom probably, when John was preaching, had gone out to hear him. Chap. xiii. 5. A reed shaken with the wind. This does not mean, Was it only to see the reeds that grow on the banks of Jordan? but rather, Was it to see a man of weak and changeable spirit, swayed this way and that by the breath of popular sentiment? One of the chief elements in John's power, was his grand, iron inflexibility. Thus would Christ say: This message does not betoken fickleness of mind, as it may at first seem to do.

Verse 8.—A man clothed in soft raiment? Perhaps you think John cannot endure the rough lot which has befallen him, that he grows impatient of his imprisonment, that for this reason he sends to me. Is that like the John whom you went out to see and to hear? Do you remember his dress, and his style of living? Chap. iii. 4. Oh, no; John was no such child of fashion, and son of ease, that a little trial of prison-life would break him down. That view is too absurd.

Verses 9, 10.—A prophet? Was he then really a prophet? No wonder those Jews were perplexed, and began to doubt whether John really was a prophet. It was important for the sake of John, of Christ, and of the cause, that there should be no doubt as to John's prophetic character; and so Christ says, with all possible emphasis, that he was a prophet, and more than a prophet. "More," because while like them inspired, he also stood in such a close personal connection with Christ, joined with him, baptizing him, and inaugurating his rite of baptism, pointing him out, raising up for him disciples, "preparing his way," "a messenger" sent immediately before him, having thus the place of chief honor.

Verse 11.—Thus, in his official character, there has never been a greater than John, no prophet above him, none his equal. And he that is least, or rather "less," in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he. After the death and resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit would come with new power; and the body of Christians gen-

erally would know more of Christ's relation to the life of the soul and of the nature of his work. So it was, so it is.

QUESTIONS.—The subject of the last lesson?

Vs. 1. Explain the phrase, "and it came to pass?" Chap. x. 2. Whence did Christ depart? What cities are meant? The difference between "teaching" and "preaching"? Did he do anything else? Vs. 5.

Vs. 2. Why was John in prison? Chap. xiv. 3, 4. Where? Were all John's disciples Christ's disciples?

Vs. 3. Who was meant by the words, "he that should come"? Why thus called? Psalm xl. 7. Did John know that Jesus was the Christ? John i. 29-34. Why then should he send such a message?

Vs. 4. What reply did Jesus make? Read Isaiah xxxv. 5; lxi. 1. Did John probably know of Christ's miracles and preaching? What would be the effect on him of this report? What is the meaning here of the word "offended"? See Matt. v. 29, 30. What blessing to one not offended in Christ?

Vs. 7-10. What kind of a man would be like "a reed shaken with the wind"? Was John such? Why this and the next question? Wherein was John more than a prophet?

Vs. 11. How is the least in the kingdom of heaven greater than John?

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher. Scripture Catechism, 140, 141.

SUNDAY, September 21st.—The gracious Call.—Matt. xi. 25-30.

Youths' Department.

MISS PLUMTREE'S MAGIC LANTERN.

There certainly was something very peculiar about Miss Plumtree; every one observed it, and it became more and more striking as the time went on. It was not that you could not tell what she may do or say under painful circumstances—that would have left her very commonplace indeed. The very peculiarity was that at those times you might be sure of her always doing and saying the very same thing. Miss Plumtree was one of those gentle souls in whom the lookers-on can discern no need of discipline, and yet to whom affliction mysteriously takes the form of a trip-hammer, sure to fall at regular intervals and with relentless weight. Or perhaps, to Miss Plumtree, it came rather like some grim guardian of the night, patrolling at stated intervals with the stern fiat, "Lights out!" and throwing all her peaceful arrangements into sudden eclipse. But no sooner did some new grief or some fresh reverse sweep all her former joys under its dreary shadow, than Miss Plumtree immediately produced from under her meek little heart a sort of psychological magic lantern, illuminated it with one of the most beautiful of smiles, and suddenly a view of something new and delightful, that nobody else had ever thought of, was thrown upon the great darkness, brilliant and magnified manifold.

It was one of those illuminating smiles enough to make a rainbow of the tear she was wiping at the moment, that she turned upon the friends who left her on the threshold of her echoing house, after the last sad ceremonies had been rendered to the last remaining member of her family.

"I'm sure I don't know what I ever should have done," she said, "if it had not been for the old house falling to my lot. So kindly ordered! I don't know how I could have borne it to go anywhere else!"

And with this quiet transfer of her affections, Miss Plumtree set herself briskly about the care of this new object, until she seemed to make it shine brighter and brighter every day. She could not lack for occupation with all the cares that come where there is no man about the house; and as for loneliness, there was no chance for that, while there were so many poor in the village, and so many neighbors going away and wanting to leave the children a few days, and distant relatives needing a home a little while. So Miss Plumtree's days, glided swiftly and happily by—very happily she thought—and she used to have a little season of thinking about it every evening, as the twilight gathered, sitting alone in her own room, with her face pressed close against the window that looked out upon the lawn. Some maiden sisters, left with such store of silver and household valuables as Miss Plumtree, would have shrunk with horror from a room with a door opening directly upon the gladiolus bed; but it was beautiful to Miss Plumtree, since an accident she had met with a few years before, though it had left her as good as new in all other respects, had made going up and down stairs a troublesome affair.

"I don't know what I ever should have

done if it hadn't been for this room lying just so," she said, one evening, as the twilight hour came and she drew her little armchair to the window and took her seat; and then from thinking about the room she fell into a reverie, until as the gladiolus bed grew more and more indistinct outside, the ghosts of times and things that had been stepped slowly out of the twilight of the past, and ranged themselves one by one before her. How happy they had all been together in those days gone by! And then when her mother was taken away how the rest clung together, she and her father and Will! How proud she was of Will, and how satisfied that the will left everything to him, with the understanding that he was always to take care of her, as her father had. And then Will began to go wrong—dreadfully wrong—the neighbors said, and when her father threatened to disinherit him, he got secret possession of the will and ran away. She did not know what she should have done then, if it had not been for her father. So kindly ordered that they were left to each other! There might have been one more, one handsomer and dearer even than Will, but her father, so kind to her and so hard to others, had driven him away too; had believed something false of him, and sworn that never so long as he lived, should he see his daughter's face with his consent. So he had gone away too, not like Will in a passion, but sorrowful enough and Miss Plumtree did not suppose he would ever come back. And even her father was taken, but she had the home with plenty of means to keep it up, and Cousin Gertrude spending the winter with her—that had all been arranged (except Cousin Gertrude) by the new will made after poor Will ran away—and she thought—very likely by next summer. Hark! What foot fall was that on the dry grass, and what form moving stealthily over the lawn in the starlight?

Miss Plumtree pressed her face closer to the pane—the figure passed out of sight, then turned and came slowly down the path again. She sprang to the door and opened it.

"Will! Dear Will!" But the figure was gone and there was no answer. In another moment she had mounted the stairs without thinking whether they were long or not, and stood in the passage-way that divided Cousin Gertrude's room from the spare chamber, with a pair of the best linen sheets in her hand. "Dear Cousin Gertrude," she exclaimed, as well as she could with the great bumping at her heart, "Will has come home! Don't tell me I am mistaken! I should know him if I only saw his shadow! He would not come when I called him, but that was only one of his odd ways. So I am just going to get his room ready, without saying anything to the servants, for I know he'll be coming pretty soon, to say he forgives me for everything, and will let me share with him just as if nothing had happened," and Miss Plumtree disappeared into the spare room. In a few moments she was back again to say that Cousin Gertrude was to go to sleep without minding her, for she should sit up awhile to listen for Will.

"I do feel a little nervous though," she added, lighting up into one of her smiles. "I don't know what I should do, if you weren't spending a little time with me, Gertrude."

Miss Plumtree listened in vain; no knock was heard at the door, nor another rustling of the grass outside the window. But the next day all the town was astir with news. Will Plumtree had come back, with the old will in his possession, and was trying to prove a flaw in the second, and eject his sister from the Plumtree estate. Unfortunately it is easier to prove evil than good, and Miss Plumtree was very soon informed that she had one month's grace in which to resign all claims and vacate the ancestral halls. At the end of that time, the friends who had accompanied her home on the day of the funeral wended their way to a little cottage which had come to Miss Plumtree from her mother's side, to see where she had taken refuge, and how she had survived the storm. But she had got out her lantern in advance of them, and illuminated everything until they hardly recognized the situation.

There she stood, in the middle of the little bare floor, with the irradiating smile on her face, the two silver candlesticks and the oval mirror, that had been her mother's, shining, the stove and the window Miss Plumtree's shining, and canary singing merrily in its cage.

"I'm sure I don't know what I ever should have done," she said, "if it hadn't

been for the cottage! So kindly ordered!" No longer encumbered with servants or relations, Miss Plumtree managed to live delightfully in her new quarters, and never admitted that she missed a single comfort; until one day the news came that the country savings-bank where her tiny maternal fortune was treasured, had failed, and not a penny was left. For one moment Miss Plumtree stood still as she listened to the tale; but in another the magic lantern was produced, and a new object thrown in bold and brilliant relief upon the shadowy foreground of her future.

"I'm sure I don't know what I should do now, if I hadn't amused myself by learning dressmaking! So kindly ordered!" she said, with such a smile that people were almost ready to believe that this was the pleasantest thing that had ever happened to her. From that day Miss Plumtree no longer lived alone. Every morning she tripped forth, workbag in hand, and flitted like a little business woman, as she was to one house or another as her engagements might demand. Everyone thought it a pleasure to see her sitting by their work-table; her form was graceful yet, and the wavy hair drawn back from her forehead and carefully knotted behind, gave such a classic contour to her head. These were her only beauties, except the smile, and that made everyone feel as if the sun shone on the darkest day.

And so all went on beautifully for a time, until Miss Plumtree began to find herself inconvenienced by a severe pain in one of her eyes. Sometimes she came to her work with a green shade over it, sometimes she did not come at all, and at last was obliged to give herself fairly into the physician's hands. For a few weeks she sat alone at home once more; after that the pain ceased and she felt quite well again, but the sight of the unruly member was gone for aye. Miss Plumtree immediately looked up her little book of engagements, and appeared next morning at the door where she had been promised for that day three months before, the illumination lighting up everything before her.

"I don't know what I ever should have done," she said, "if it hadn't been for my having another eye!"

Miss Plumtree had given up the habit of sitting with her face against the pane, since the night she had seen the shadowy figure pass along the rustling grass. But she still kept up her little twilight season of thinking over matters, and how kindly everything had been ordered for her since she could remember.

"But poor dear Will!" She had been so happy in thinking of his having everything, and now she heard he was running through it very fast, and sure to get into trouble before long. She wondered if he would ever come and share with her if the worst came to the worst. She was afraid he would not, everything would seem a change! And there was some one else! How changed everything would seem to him—to Philip—if he were ever to come back! But he could not have heard that there was no one now to interfere. She did not think he would ever hear; probably he had gone a great way off and would never know.

One November night Miss Plumtree, as usual, slept her twilight thoughts quietly away, and awoke to find a great surprise awaiting her. An invitation from some friends living some fifty miles away, to come and pass a few days with them. It was the first invitation of any kind Miss Plumtree had received since she left the old house, and she really did not feel that she ought to have any, now that she had no longer any hospitality to offer. But here was the letter, very positive indeed, and refusing to take no for an answer. So she put some things in a satchel and set off the next morning with the carrier.

"I shall certainly be back the last day of the month," she said, "for I am engaged all the first week in December."

The days glided by as such days will do, the oasis seeming smaller for its very greenness in the desert, the last day of the month arrived, the carrier's waygonette was heard rattling down the village hill, and there, on the driver's box, her nose a little red with the cold, but luxuriating in the free, fresh air, sat Miss Plumtree, punctual to the hour and minute. How good it would seem to see the little cottage again! They should make it in another minute, but the pastor's house was so much higher, it cut off the view just here. Now they were passing the minister's; and Miss Plumtree began to look under the apron for her satchel.

"Look!" exclaimed the driver, and Miss Plumtree glanced quickly up. A fallen