

The Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, N. S., OCTOBER 28, 1874.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1874.]

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, November 1st, 1874.

The Fig Tree Withered.—Mark xi. 12-14, 19-24.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of him." 1 John v. 14, 15.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verse 24.

SUMMARY.—Jesus curses the barren fig-tree: it withers. A lesson of faith in God.

These incidents occurred April 3rd and 4th, A. D. 30. Parallel passage: Matt. xxi. 18, 24.

Between this and the last lesson, Mark records our Lord's public entry into Jerusalem.

Verse 12.—On the morrow, after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Mark is very definite and exact in regarding the first three days of this week, vs. 1, 11, 19, 20.

When they had come out of Bethany. Matthew states that it was in "the morning," the early morning between daybreak and sunrise. Luke (xxi. 38) informs us that the people came early in the morning to hear him.

He was hungry.—It was real hunger. In his haste to enter upon his work he had probably taken no breakfast at Bethany. Some suppose that he had passed the night in the open air, in solitude and prayer. Hunger was a part of his humiliation. Thus he became perfect through sufferings, and able to sympathize with his followers in every trial.

Verse 13.—Seeing a fig-tree afar off; distant from them. The fig-tree was one of the most common and valuable trees of Palestine (Deut. viii. 8), and was a symbol of peace and plenty. 1 Kings iv. 25. It grows to a height of about twelve feet, with spreading branches and large dark-green leaves. The fruit is purple when ripe, with sweet pulp and abundance of small seeds.

Having leaves. Its fruit begins to appear before its leaves shoot forth; hence the leaves gave promise of fruit. The fresh fruit is shaped like a pear, and whether fresh or dried is greatly prized.

If haply he might, etc. To see whether he should find anything thereon. It was not for his own information, but for that of his disciples, and for their good. According to Matthew the tree was by the roadside; it was therefore lawful for travelers to eat of its fruit.

He found nothing but leaves; instead of fruit of some size, as might have been expected from its appearance.

For it was not the season of figs. The ordinary season of figs had not arrived. The early fig ripened in June, the summer fig in August, and a later fig sometimes hung upon the tree all winter. Mark makes this statement for the information of his foreign readers, to show that it was not too late for figs, and at the same time that the development of the leaves was premature and unnatural. Its signs were false, its appearance deceptive. It was thus an emblem of the hypocrite, and particularly of the Jewish people, with their high professions, their show of ritual and formal worship, without the fruits of righteousness, Jer. ii. 21; Luke xiii. 6-9. The Jews alone among the nations professed to be worshippers of Jehovah, but they were barren of fruit.

Verse 14.—Answering the fig-tree, which silently acknowledged its inability to afford fruit, notwithstanding its pretentious appearance.

Let no man eat. A strong emphatic, negative wish, expressing the will of Jesus respecting the fig-tree, henceforth, forever, let no one eat fruit from thee. There was no vindictive feeling connected with this expression, nor any implied in the word cursed as used by the disciples in vs. 21. Skeptics have caviled at the destruction of property. But the fig-tree was by the wayside, and probably the property on one. It belonged, however, to Jesus, in the highest sense, and he could do as he pleased with his own, Matt. xx. 15. It was barren, and worse than useless; for it might mock the hungry traveler as it had him.

The fig-tree, and its destruction, may also be considered as a symbol of the spiritual condition and end of the Jewish nation, and of hypocrites in general. It is only

the fruitless or barren fig-tree that is brought prominently forward in the New Testament, in these two instances, and in each is used as a symbol of evil.

His disciples heard it; and were accordingly impressed by it.

Verse 20.—Between this verse and ver. 14, Mark records the expelling of the traders from the temple.

In the morning. Early in the morning; the people came early to hear him in the Loke xxi. 38. Mark with great exactness fixes this incident about to be related upon the morning, after the cursing of the fig-tree.

And passing by from Bethany or the place on Olivet (Luke xxi. 37) where they lodged during the night; they were without doubt upon the same road as the morning before, ver. 12.

They saw the fig-tree. Now for the first time since the previous morning.

Dried up from the roots. Not merely in its tender branches and limbs, but in its trunk, and down to its very roots. Very likely it was stripped of its leaves, and presented the appearance of a thoroughly-blasted tree, dead in root and branch. From Matthew (xxi. 19) we learn that the withering began immediately after the words of Jesus, "Let no fruit grow," etc.

Verse 21.—Peter calling to remembrance. This is one of the special references to Peter in this Gospel, presenting what was going on in Peter's mind, which confirms the common opinion that Mark wrote it under his direction.

Master; or Rabbi, or My Master.

B hold. The fig-tree which thou didst curse. This is the only place where Jesus is spoken of as cursing the fig-tree, or indeed any object. He cursed the tree, only in the sense of devoting it to death, which he had a perfect right to do as Lord of both animate and inanimate creation.

Verse 22.—Jesus answers in a way best suited to benefit his disciples.

Have faith in God. A strong expression. Hold a steadfast trust and confidence in God. Here we get one of the designs of this miracle. He would strengthen their faith and prepare them for the trials before them.

Verse 23.—Jesus proceeds to teach them that through faith they might perform even greater miracles.

This mountain. Probably the Mount of Olives, over which they were passing. It is implied that Jesus could have removed this mountain as well as have dried up the fig-tree. Compare Zech. xiv. 4.

The Sea. A general expression, the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee, or the Mediterranean Sea, being several miles distant.

The kind of faith Jesus describes: First the negative side, shall not doubt in his heart, without hesitation or wavering. Second, the positive side, shall believe that what he says comes to pass; shall so believe that the answer is a present reality, indeed granted, and as certain as if already accomplished.

The exercise of faith in miracles, as well as in prayer, must be in accordance with the will of God. The mountain may symbolize any great and apparently insurmountable difficulty. Faith is also attended with works, James ii. 18. And by works the man of faith often in a measure, answers his own prayers. He meets these mountains of difficulties with an earnest, active faith, and they disappear before him as he labors on. See on ch. ix. 29; Matt. xvii. 20.

Verse 24.—Therefore, For this reason, that faith is essential in obtaining divine help, and to encourage you, I say to you.

What things soever ye desire when ye pray.— True prayer is inspired by God, and hence will be according to his will (1 John v. 14), and in the name of Christ (John xiv. 13), and will be answered either in kind or in equivalent, 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. Matt. xviii. 4.

Believe that ye receive; that your request was granted while in the very act of prayer. This reading is according to the best critical authorities. In the preceding verse the answer of prayer is vividly regarded as a present fact; in this as a past fact attending the prayer itself. Thus Daniel prayed for the restoration of Jerusalem; and Gabriel informs him, "At the beginning of thy supplication the commandment came forth," that is, "the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem," Dan. ix. 3, 23, 25. While in the act of prayer his request was granted, and the blessing sought was received, though many years were required for its accomplishment.

The faith in God which Jesus was enforcing upon his disciples, was something that they needed at all times and under all circumstances. They especially needed it under the great trials of that week of conflict, suffering and darkness.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.

1. Jesus knows what are the demands of appetite and the infirmities of our nature, ver. 12; Heb. iv. 15.

2. How great the danger of formality and unfruitfulness in religion. We must bear fruit if we would meet our Lord's approval, ver. 13, 14.

3. They who fail to bring forth fruit to Christ shall forever be given over to barrenness and death, ver. 14.

4. The vegetable creation is dependent on Christ. All will wither if not supported by him, ver. 20.

5. Jesus is the Lion as well as the Lamb. In him is exhibited the severity as well as the goodness of God, ver. 21.

6. How great the importance of faith. What a privilege and power to the Christian, ver. 22-24.

7. The miracles of Christ should encourage us to pray and to believe him. He is ready to exert the same Almighty power in our behalf and for his kingdom, ver. 22, 23.

8. The answer to the prayer of faith is certain and immediate, although not always manifest at once, ver. 24.—Mighty Worker.

SUNDAY, November 8th, 1874.—The Two Commandments.—Mark xii: 28-34.

Youths' Department.

THE CHURCH SPIDER.

The following lines are dedicated to those whom they may concern:

Two spiders, so the story goes, Upon a living bent, Entered the meeting-house one day, And hopefully were heard to say, "Here we shall have at least fair play, With nothing to prevent."

Each chose his place, and went to work; The light webs grew apace; One on the altar spun his thread, But shortly came the sexton dread And swept him off, and so, half dead, He sought another place.

"I'll try the pulpit next," said he, "There surely is a prize; The desk appears so neat and clean, I'm sure no spider there has been; Besides, how often I have seen 'The pastor brushing flies."

He tried the pulpit, but, alas! His hopes proved visionary; With dusting-brush the sexton came, And spoiled his geometric game, Nor gave him time nor space to claim The right of sanctuary.

At length, half starved, and weak, and lean, He sought his former neighbor, Who now had grown so sleek and round He weighed the fraction of a pound, And looked as if the art he'd found Of living without labor.

"How is it, friend," he asked, "that I Endure such thumps and knocks, While you have grown so very gross?" "Tis plain," he answered; "not a loss I've met since first I spun across 'The contribution-box."

J. E. B.

HEALTH BETTER THAN WEALTH.

Little Martin was a poor boy, who had no father nor mother. He earned his bread by going errands. One day, on his way home, he sat down to rest, and to eat his piece of dry bread near the door of an inn. As he sat there a fine carriage drove up and the master of the inn came out to serve two gentlemen who were in it. One of them was very young—not much older than Martin; and Martin thought to himself that he would like to be in his place. When he looked at his own crust of bread and his worn clothes, and then at their fine things, he could not help saying aloud:— "O dear, I wish I had that young gentleman's grand coach. I wish I could change places with him."

The other gentleman, who was the boy's tutor, heard this, and told it to his pupil, who made signs to Martin to come to him. "So, little boy," she he, "you would like to change places with me, would you?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Martin, "I did not mean any harm by what I said?"

"I am not angry," said the young gentleman; "I only wish to know if you are willing to change places with me."

"O, now you are joking," said Martin; "no one would wish to change places with me, and walk so many miles each day, and have nothing to eat but a dry crust."

"Well," said the young man. "I will give you all I have, if you will give me all that you have and that I have not."

Martin did not know what to say; but the tutor told him to speak freely.

"O yes," said Martin then; "I will change places with you."

But when the young gentleman stepped out, Martin saw that he was very lame. His legs were bent so that he had to walk with crutches. His face was pale and thin, too, like that of one who is often ill. Martin then began to think that health was better than a fine carriage.

"Will you change places with me now?" said the youth. "I will give you all that I have to be strong like you."

But Martin said, "O no; not for the world."

"I would gladly be poor," said the young man, "if I could run like you; but as it is God's will that I should be lame, I try to be happy and thankful as I am."

Church and State.

EQUAL FRIENDSHIPS BEST.

A FABLE.

By Mrs. Prosser.

"Ah! whatever has become of you lately, Shag?" cried Drover. "I've missed you after evening shepherding this week or more."

"I've been engaged," said Shag, coldly. "Engaged! How? Where?" said Drover.

"With company—the new company at the great house," said Shag.

"Oh, ho! What, Crack and Brilliant, and the rest?" said Drover.

"Yes. They seemed to wish for my friendship, so I couldn't be uncivil, said Shag.

"Very good; and you are going now?" inquired Drover. "Don't let me hinder you."

"I was. You see, Drover, they are highbred; and I think, when an opening offers, we should always try to improve ourselves."

"Certainly. A very improving evening to you," said Drover.

"You think so, don't you?" said Shag. "I think the best company is that we get most good from," said Drover.

"Yes, that's it," said Shag; "and Mr. Crack has such a beautiful way of moving (action they call it), and Mr. Brilliant is so quick and clever, and they are all so superior one way or another."

"Happy to hear it. But I think your 'action' and cleverness are quite sufficient for your way of life. However, please yourself," said Drover, running on.

"Why, Shag! you here!" he cried, a few evenings after. "I thought you had cut low company, and were on the improving plan!"

"Ahem! I preferred a walk with you this evening, Drover," said Shag, looking rather shy.

"Very good," said Drover. "How are your friends at the great house?"

"Very well, for anything I know," said Shag.

"What! have you broken with them?" asked Drover.

"To say the truth, I was deceived in them. They are low, ill-bred, conceited fellows, and I despise them!" said Shag.

"When did you find that out?" asked Drover.

"Last night," said Shag. "They were together with Mr. Commodore, the captain's dog, and when I went to them they looked as if they didn't know me, and Mr. Crack asked me how it was I wasn't shepherding. So I walked away, and I don't mean to go near them again."

"Then you've done being improved?" said Drover.

"Oh, don't laugh at me," said Shag.

"I won't; only be advised, and never expect steady friendship out of your own beat. You may, for some capricious reason, be patronized and kept on sufferance for a time, but the merest trifle will be enough to take away the favor in the same caprice that bestowed it."

DOES IT PAY TO BE SURLY?

It was only one customer that the surly man snubbed. The customer asked for ten cents' worth of wire. The surly man said something to him about the trouble of cutting off so small a piece, and sneered at him for being such a small customer. He cut it off from the roll; and the customer, who had intended to buy some hinges and bolts, and two or three locks, which might have amounted in all to five dollars, concluded he would deal at some other store for the rest. He paid for his ten cents' worth of wire, and pushed on to the next hardware-store. The surly man did not even bid him good day.

That one customer seemed a very small affair to the dealer, because he wanted to purchase such a limited amount of merchandise. He forgot that a man does not

ask in one breath for all he wants. He forgot that the small customer of to-day may be the larger customer of to-morrow. He forgot that the man who is shabbily treated at the store seldom returns to it, unless for something which cannot be purchased elsewhere. He forgot the influence which each customer carries with him for good or ill.

Courtesy brings custom; and if custom brings success in business, courtesy must not be neglected. A man who is politely treated at a store is very apt to come again, and to mention his experience to his friends. A man who is rudely dealt with is still more apt to tell his friends of it, and to warn them against the place.

Some men have built up large business, and have made money, in spite of their uncivil treatment of people with whom they deal. How much more they might have made if they had been polite, it is difficult to calculate. But let every young man understand that, all things being equal, the courteous business man will make a much better success of his work than the crusty and ill-natured one.—My Paper.

THE GOLDEN RULE.

"Be thou in the fear of the Lord, all the day long." Prov. xxiii. 17.

When you think, when you speak, when you read, when you write, When you sing, when you walk, when you seek for delight,

To be kept from all evil, at home and abroad, Live always as under the eye of the Lord. Whatever you think, both in joy and in woe,

Think nothing you would not like God to know, Whatever you say in a whisper or clear Say nothing you would not like God to hear, Whatever you read, though the page may allure,

Read nothing of which, you are perfectly sure, Consternation at once, would be seen in your look,

If God should say solemnly "Show me the book!" Whatever you write, in haste, or in heed, Write nothing you would not like God to read;

Whatever you sing, in the midst of your glees, Sing nothing that God's listening ear can displease,

Wherever you go, never go where you fear God's question being asked you "What doest thou here?"

Whatever the pastime, in which you engage, For the cheering of youth, or the solace of age,

Turn away from each pleasure, you'd shrink from pursuing, Were God to look down, and say, "What are you doing?"

THE HUNDRED-POUND NOTE.

Be careful how you hastily accuse, or even suspect, persons of crime. Life is too short to correct the errors, or repair mischiefs, which often result from such a course.

A story is told of a banker who missed a hundred-pound note from his safe. He had placed it there himself. No one had access to it but a confidential clerk. The clerk was charged with the theft, but declared his entire innocence. He had long served the banker; no suspicion had ever before attached to him. But the money was gone, and how else could it have been removed? He only could enter the safe, therefore he must have stolen it. Circumstances were against him, so he was dismissed. The charge clung to him. He could obtain no other situation, and finally died in disgrace and poverty. Years afterward the safe was overhauled for repairs, and there, behind the drawer from which it had slipped when placed by the owner, was the hundred-pound note. Yet, every one at the time believed the clerk guilty, because no other reason could be found for the disappearance of the money. Similar experiences are constantly occurring.

The day of judgment will reveal a great many such cases, where the innocent have suffered wrongfully. And what shall be the fate of the authors of such wrongs? It is best to judge not, lest we be judged, —to judge nothing before the time, till the Lord come, who shall bring both to light the hidden things of darkness, and manifest the counsels of the hearts.

Dr. John Hall, remarking that in England they distinguish people into two classes, Churchmen and Dissenters, thinks that in America they might be divided into Churchmen and Absenters.

Mrs. Nannie Lewellyn, of Texas, a widow, thirty-five years of age, has been received by the foreign mission board of the Southern Baptist Convention, as a missionary to China.