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BIBLE LESSONS.

STUDIES IN MARK.

Second Quarter.

Lesson III. April 21. Mark 12: 28-34.

THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Love is the fulfilling of the law.—Rom. 13: 10.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE SCRIBE'S QUESTION. 28. *And one of the scribes: Matthew calls him a lawyer. The scribes were learned men, skilled in the Jewish law. Having heard them reasoning together. He had listened to the discussions of our Lord with the Herodians about the tribute, and with the Sadducees about the resurrection (Mark 12: 13-27). And perceiving that he had answered them well; rightly, admirably. There is nothing like the truth, simple and complete, to enable us to escape puzzling difficulties which others place in our path. Asked. Matthew (22: 35) adds, tempting him. Not, perhaps, maliciously, but in the sense of testing on another question on the wisdom one who answered a previous question so admirably. Which is the first commandment of all? First in importance. This was a question which, with some others, divided the Jewish teachers into rival schools, and was a constant bone of contention. Some contended for the law of circumcision; others, for that of sacrifice; others, for that of phylacteries, the Sabbath, the law against idolatry. They seemed to expect that no matter which Jesus called the first He would make enemies of all those who advocated others.*

II. LOVE TO GOD THE SUM OF THE FIRST TABLE OF THE LAW. 29. *Jesus answered him: by quoting from Deut. 6: 4, 5, the very words which "every devout Jew recited twice every day, and the Jews do it to this day." Thus Jesus' answer from their own Bible; in words they regarded as supremely sacred, led him out safely from the snares the Pharisees had set for him. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. This mighty text contains far more than a mere declaration that God is one. It asserts that the Lord God of Israel is absolutely God, and none other.*

One of the best services science has done for religion is the completeness of the proof that there is but one God, by proving the unity of material, of force, of government throughout the known universe. The unity of moral law is another unassailable proof.

30. *And thou shalt love the Lord. We have here the language of law, expressive of God's claims. What, then, are we bound down to do? One word is made to express it. And what a word!*

Love to God. "Some persons would make religion to consist of little else than a self-denying course of the practice of virtue and obedience. They make it a kind of house of correction. But no! I love the service of my God: like the bird I fly at liberty on the wings of obedience to his holy will."

The Lord thy God. He is not only Lord of all in general, but he is in personal relations to us which make our duty and privilege to love Him.

How we should love God. With all thy heart. Heart denotes in general terms the affection and will; affectionate choice, "the love of conscious resolve, expressed with will, which must at once become a second nature."

And with all thy soul. Soul is the individual existence, the person himself, the seat of the will, disposition, desires, character. The two words are united to teach that the entire, the undivided person must share in that which it has to perform with the heart. With all thy mind. This commands our intellectual nature: "Thou shalt put intelligence into thine affection"—in opposition to a blind devotion, or mere devoteism.

With all thy strength. Enjoins the full and entire devotion of all these powers. Love to God that is not supreme is not love at all. This is the first commandment: in order and importance. It is the foundation commandment. He that obeys this will necessarily obey all others.

REASONS FOR LOVING GOD SUPREMACY. (1) He is supremely good. He is the sum of all good. He that loves God loves all that is good and hates all that is evil. (2) He is not only good, but lovable. His goodness is attractive; it is worthy of love. (3) All we have and are owe to Him. (4) "The best thing in man is love, and God wants the best." (5) Such love not only honors God, but elevates man.

LOVE FULFILLING THE LAW. Love fulfills the law in two ways. (1) It makes the keeping of the law completely full. Unloving obedience satisfies no parent, much less our heavenly Father. (2) Love leads to the fulfilling of the law. He that loves God will obey God.

III. LOVE TO MAN THE SUM OF THE SECOND TABLE OF THE LAW. And the second is like. The first is the sun, so to speak, of the spiritual life; this is the lesser light, which reflects the shining of that other. It is like to it inasmuch as both are laws of love; both deduced from the great and highest love; both dependent on "I am the Lord thy God." Thou shalt love thy neighbor. On "who is my neighbor?" see Luke 10: 25, 27. Our neighbor is every one whom we can help.

THE MEASURE OF LOVE. As thyself. (1) Not as he does love himself, but as he ought to love himself. (2) After the same manner, i. e., freely and readily, sincerely and unfeignedly, tenderly and compassionately, constantly and perseveringly. Cases arise where man ought to love his neighbor more than his life—physical life, and has done so, sacrificing it for his fellows, his country, and the church, in imitation of the example of Christ and the martyrs. This love is the principle in the heart from which flows the Golden Rule in practice, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt. 7: 12). There is none other commandment greater than these. The unity of the moral law prevents any discrimination between its precepts; it is the one law of love, the hinge of the whole Old Testament revelation.

APPLICATION TO THE COMMANDMENT. He that possesses a heart of love, loving his neighbor as himself, will necessarily obey the second table of the law; for obedience to these laws is the natural fruit of such love.

IV. NOW WAS FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD. 32. *The scribe said unto him, Well (an exclamation, as if he said, "Good!") "Admirable!" Master. Mark alone records the effect of our Lord's answer upon the scribe. It came home to his heart with convincing power.*

33. *To love... is more (more acceptable; of more value) than all who burnt offerings and sacrifices. The scribe gathered up in his reply some of the great utterances of the prophets which prove the superiority of love to God and man over all mere ceremonial observances. (See 1 Sam. 15: 22; Ps. 51; Hos. 6: 6; Mic. 6: 6, 8).*

WHY IS LOVE MORE THAN THESE? (1) Because it is nobler in nature, infinitely above in quality, as the soul is above the body, as thought is greater than language. (2) Love is the very thing which sacrifices were meant to produce and express. (3) Love is most effective in leading to obedience toward God, in cultivating all virtues, in producing good works. One can offer sacrifices and still be bad; but no one can love as here described and not be holy and heavenly.

34. *And when Jesus saw that He answered discreetly. Literally, having his mind in possession; having his wits about him. Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. This man had hold of that principle in which law and Gospel are one. He stood, as it were, at the door of the kingdom of God.*

ALMOST IN THE KINGDOM. Those who are not from the kingdom who like this man (1) of a sincere and open mind. (2) Those who, like him, realize in their minds the true nature of the kingdom, and see plainly what they must do and be. (3) Those who with these things are far from who are yet young and have been trained under Christian influences and in Bible truths.

NOW (1) that those who are merely men (2) that those who are not saved. (3) They will not remain near. They must either enter, or drift further away. (3) It will be a sad thing to be lost after having been brought so near. The contrast will greatly enhance the misery. (4) Who one is near is the best time to enter. Enter at once. No man after that dusk ask him any question. No other attempt was henceforth made to entangle the Redeemer by replies to subtle questions; "all alike kept aloof from One from whom chief priests and rabbies equally went away humbled."

How Eric Went Fishing in Winter. A STORY FOR THE LITTLE FOLK.

"O father, will it ever be spring again? Just look! It's snowing hard. I don't believe it will ever melt."

"What's your hurry, Eric? I thought you liked winter, when you could skate and coast."

"I know, sir," replied Eric, disconsolately, fastening his already rather numb nose against the pane. "But I'm tired of that now. There's been good skating for a whole month; and now I want to go fishing."

"Fishing! What kind of fish?"

"Mr. Conroy put down his manuscript, and laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"Why, trout or pickerel, you know, father. I want to go down to grandfather's with you, just as we did last year, and go fishing. Perhaps we'll camp out next time, you said."

"Look here, Eric, I am just as fond of fishing as you are; but everything must have its season. If the snow didn't come down in winter and heap up in big drifts, there'd be no brooks for the fish to swim in by the time we were ready to start. Yet, if it got so warm in the hills, and then melts and soaks into the ground in March and April, and so, with the help of the rains that follow, keeps the streams flowing all summer."

Eric looked only half satisfied, and sighed as he turned again to the window, and saw the whirling white storm of flakes outside.

"I'll tell you," continued his father, after a moment's silence, "I've thought of a way to go fishing in winter."

"Oh, jolly!" Eric's face brightened at once.

"Don't be disappointed, my boy. I don't mean fishing for real, slippery fish, like trout and shiners, but a great deal harder kind of catch, for all that."

"What are they? What is the name of them, sir?"

"Opportunities. A good many times every day you have opportunities for doing kind acts, saying gentle words, doing your duty in different ways. If you seize them at once—or hook them, we fishermen will say—and don't let them escape, they are of truest kind of value. If once gets away, it never can be caught again."

"Mr. Conroy's face was very grave as he said these last words.

"However," he added, in a more cheerful tone, "if you watch very carefully and fish very skillfully, another opportunity may come swimming along, exactly like the first that got away, and you can catch the second one. If it were not for that, it would be a sad world indeed."

Eric understood enough of his father's allegory to enter heartily into the spirit of it.

"I'll begin this very morning," he cried. "I'll see how many fish I can catch to-day."

"Very well, Eric. Show me your string when I come home from business."

At five o'clock, Mr. Conroy's key was heard in the front door, and in came, shivering and with a wonderful amount of coat and trousers, a joyful-looking man, as usual, from wife and children; and after dinner all five (for Eric had two nice sisters, Ruth and Jeannie) gathered in the sitting-room around a blazing fire.

"Now, my boy," said Mr. Conroy, "let's see your string."

The girls were busily talking with their mother just then, so that they heard nothing of what followed.

Eric produced a rumpled piece of paper, smoothed it out, and read as follows:

FISHES CAUGHT BY ERIC CONROY, DEC. 13/87.

1. Path shovelled.

2. Old man.

3. Spelling lesson.

4. Zeffor.

5. Jeannie's doll.

6. Horse-car.

7. XXXX

"Well, well," exclaimed Mr. Conroy, his eyes twinkling, "that is a good string. Now let's see what they all mean. 'That path was the one I wanted you to do before school, I suppose?'"

"Yes, sir; and I made good straight sides to it, just as you told me. The 'old man' was just in front of the school-yard. He was riding in a pump; and we snow-balled him of course. He was a splendid shot—going so slow, you know, sir, and a big fur cap! Well, he got hit in the back—I guess it didn't hurt him much—but he turned to see who was pelting him, and then I saw his hair was gray, and a bundle tumbled off the seat into the snow, and the fellows set up a laugh! He did look funny you see—such a cap!"

"Well, sir, I thought all at once, he's a fish that almost got away. So I rushed out after him and picked up the bundle, and brushed off the snow and gave it to him, and said I hoped the snow-balls didn't hurt. And he gave a little laugh, and said, 'Not very bad,' and drove off again, all bent up—he was awful old, when you got close to. I wanted to try once more for that cap; but I didn't, because then the fish wouldn't count, you know?"

"Go on, Eric," said his father, patting his shoulder softly.

"Well, let me see—oh, the next was the spelling lesson. Teacher said it was the best I'd had for a week. So I thought I might catch that a fish, because I truly did study extra hard."

"And now," said Mr. Conroy, soberly, "what's 'zeffor' I don't remember that I ever saw one."

"Why, that's something that mother prophesied. I went to the store for her on my way home from school."

"From the spelling-lesson?"

"Yes, sir," wondering what made his father laugh so. "I'm sure I don't know what the name means. It's sort of soft stuff, like yarn. Oh, is that it?" Mr. Conroy showed him the word "zeffor" in a dictionary. "Why, I never thought it had anything to do with that!"

"Well, we won't throw away that fish because he wasn't spelled properly. How about Jeannie's doll?"

"Her left leg, sir. It dropped off, and the sawdust mostly run out. I put in some real cedar sawdust, out of my bird's-egg box, to keep out moths, and fixed it all up. Then there was the car I stopped for a lady, this afternoon. She tried to holler like everything, but she just squealed a little; and the conductor didn't hear. So I gave her one good whistle on my fingers. Shall I show you how, sir?"

"No, no," laughed Mr. Conroy. "I'll imagine it. But before we go any further, Eric, just bring me those boots I left at the cobbler's to be mended. You called for them this afternoon, I suppose?"

Eric flushed.

"No, no, sir. I forgot all about them. That's No. 7. I made a lot of crosses there to show that that fish had got away. But I'll have him to-morrow, sure!"

And well satisfied with his day's fishing, as well as with the pleased look in his father's face, Eric took his seat before the fire to listen to Dickens' "Christmas Carol," which his older sister Ruth was just beginning to read aloud.—Willis Boyd Allen, in Christian Register.

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