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BIBLE LESSONS.

STUDIES IN MARK. Second Quarter.

LESSON VI. May 12. Mark 14: 1-9.

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY.

GOLDEN TEXT.

She hath done what she could.—Mark 14: 1-9.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE CONSPIRACY. 1. After two days. It was Tuesday evening, and the Passover was Thursday evening. Was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread, the Passover meal was the beginning of the feast of unleavened bread, which lasted for seven days. And the chief priests: the heads of the 24 courses of priests who served in the temple by turns. And the scribes. Jews learned in the law, and recognized as religious leaders. And sought how they might kill Him.

2. But they said, Not on the feast. The feast lasted seven days, and they proposed to keep Him out of the way, but quietly, so long as the feast lasted, and after that to kill Him. Let there be an uproar. The rulers feared a popular rising on the part of those numerous friends who had come from a distance with Him. Before they separated, a message reached them from Judas, which shot a gleam of fierce joy into their hearts.

3. We now turn to an event which took place three days before the meeting of the Sanhedrin just mentioned; for this story explains the action of Judas. And being in Bethany. Jesus reached Bethany from Jericho, after opening the eyes of blind Bartimeus on Friday evening. He spent the Sabbath there and after his close at sunset met his friends in this social supper. (See John 12: 1.)

4. Bethany. A village about two miles east of Jerusalem (John 11: 18), being on the other side of the Mount of Olives. In the house of Simon the leper. That is, the person who had formerly been a leper, and was probably cured by Jesus.

5. JESUS ANOINTED WITH PEARCE'S NARD. 3. As He sat at meat. Reclined at the supper table. They had couches, not chairs, for the guests. There came a woman. Mary, the sister of Martha, and Lazarus (John 12: 3), not the woman in Luke 7, "who was a sinner." Having an alabaster box: or flask. Literally, an alabaster, just as we call a drinking vessel made of glass, a glass. Of ointment of spikenard. Rev. Ver., pure nard. The words literally mean "ointment of nard, spiced." It was rather a light perfume than what we commonly know as ointment. Very precious. Both on account of the amount, which was a pound, a Roman Litra, 12 oz. (John 12: 3), and on account of the quality. And she brake the ointment. The flask, or cruse, probably had a long neck and a small mouth, to prevent evaporation, and the precious ointment was ordinarily extracted in small quantities. And poured it on His head. And also (John 12: 3) on his feet; a luxury, Jeremy Taylor says, no emperor or king would have indulged in.

6. Her motive was to express to the utmost her devotion and holy love. Jesus was the intimate friend of the family. Expressions of our love to Jesus. (1) Love in the heart always desires to express itself in action, to make sacrifices for the loved. (2) It is not the largeness or the smallness of the gifts, but the cost to us, the self-sacrifice in giving, made freely and gladly, that measures love. (3) There is great value in these expressions to those that receive them. (4) Love is increased by expressing it.

7. FAULTFINDING WITH MARY'S ACTION. 4. And there were some that had indignation. John says it was Judas who was the fountain and source of the complaint, and who spoke it out. The others had none of his base motives, but they may honestly have felt that the act was a wasteful one, and the money could have been used for a better purpose. Why was this waste of the ointment made? The simple question was whether the best, the most enduring use was made of this ointment. In Judas' eyes it was wasted, for to his sordid vision only what brought physical comfort was well worth anything. He was filled to the brim with his selfish use. So many now think that what is given away to help the poor, to Christianize the heathen, to endow institutions for education, what is spent in books, culture, enlargement of the mind, that all these are waste. But it is the Judas spirit, not the Christ spirit, that says so.

8. For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence. Literally, denarii. The Roman denarius (penny) is a silver coin worth 16 or 16 cents. And they murmured against her. Addressed her harshly.

9. Note that the apostles do not hesitate to record even those actions which are creditable to themselves.

10. JESUS' DEFENSE OF MARY. 6. And Jesus said, Let her alone. Spoken chiefly to Judas (John 12: 7), as the most prominent of the murmurers. Let her alone is the language of sharp rebuke. Why trouble ye her? This indicates that Mary was herself abashed and downcast by the criticism of the twelve. Perhaps, as Maurice says, "She could not herself have answered Judas' scurrilous complaining question."

11. FIRST DEFENSE. Her act was good in principle. She hath wrought a good work on me. The Greek adjective implies something more than "good," a noble, an honorable work. (1) This spirit is the source and fountain of good to others. (2) No giving to the poor is of great value to them without this spirit of love. (3) It is an act of the highest and noblest part of our nature, and thus best cultures

and upbuilds the soul. (4) It honors God. SECOND DEFENSE. The act did not interfere with gifts to the poor. 7. For ye have the poor with you always. They would have plenty of opportunities to aid them; and the more they did for the poor, the more they would do for the poor, for the poor are left in His attitude and through them would be expressed the increased love of the Master.

THIRD DEFENSE. The fitness and timeliness of the gift. But me you have not always. If the disciples would express their love to Jesus in person, they must do it then or not at all. The opportunity of that evening never returned to them. 8. She hath done what she could. This praise is more precious than the ointment, coming from such an one as Christ. Blessed are they of whom the Master will say, "They have done what they could." She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. It is worthy of note that this was all the anointing which our Lord's body received before he lay in the tomb. Mary, our friends, inasmuch as He had risen before they reached the sepulchre with their spices.

FOURTH DEFENSE. Her act shall be forever fruitful of good. 9. Whosoever this gospel shall be preached. The story here shows that our Lord expected His gospel to be diffused throughout the world. Throughout the whole world. This story has been told in every known tongue, and is now being related in more than 250 different languages, to every generation on the earth. Shall we wonder, then, for a memorial of her. In the act of love done to Him she has erected to herself an eternal monument, as lasting as the gospel, the eternal Word of God. A good work wrought for Christ does not die away in the doing of it. It lives on in influence on other minds, and in every good thought and feeling and desire which, directly or indirectly, it may be the means of exciting.

Lights on the Ganges. BY THE REV. E. W. PARKER, D. D.

As the time of the full moon in October or November draws near, thousands of Hindus gather on the banks of their sacred river, the Ganges, and fix noted centers or shrines, about fifty miles from each other, for the purpose of bathing in the holy water and worshipping the goddess of the river, thus washing away their sins. At each of the larger shrines there are said to be less than over 200,000 people present, and the number often reaches 400,000.

It is well known that every Hindu looks towards the Ganges river as his last resting place. Hence, burning "ghats" for burning the dead are found along the banks of the stream, but especially at these sacred places. When the body is partially or entirely consumed the remains are cast into the river. This is the orthodox system, but many poor people cast their dead, unburned, into the stream. Mistakes, however, of the Hindus reside a long distance from the Ganges, and are unable to burn their dead on its sacred banks. Hence, the dead are burned at the places set apart for this purpose in each town or city, and some portions of the bodies are carried to the river, and are usually conveyed to the river when they go to these annual gatherings—these great "melas"—in October or November. Is it strange that the Hindus love their holy river? Here they have carried their dead; here they believe, and sin have been, as they believe, often washed away; and here they hope or final rest.

During these "melas" at evening the people may be seen making little reed boats about one foot in diameter, placing little earthen lamps on them, and pushing them out into the stream. On one boat there may be two of these little lights, on another four, and on another nine, perhaps having reference to the number of mourners represented. Attending one of the "melas," and seeing the people preparing and sending out these lights, until the river, thus lighted up, was grand to behold, I drew one of the religious priests one side and asked him to explain to me the meaning of the lights. "The lights," said he, "are for the dead. Our departed ones, you know, are brought to this river; but after passing from the body they are, we fear, in darkness. It is said that they have to pass through a dark valley in getting to the other side, and that the path over which they must walk is no wider than a man's hand, and that the flames of the lights are in that danger. They say that lights placed on the sacred river in some way give light ever into the beyond, and aid the departed ones. Hence, at these melas we Hindus place lights on the river, hoping thus to give light to the friends who have gone."

As I was watching these lights I walked down to the water's edge, and stood beside one of the "Faqirs" (religious mendicants), and noticed that, as people were about to place their lights on the water, they were placing their hands on their heads. I stood for a little watching this strange, interesting scene, and then said to the priest: "Brother, what is this?"

He turned toward me in a friendly manner, and said: "I was lighting the departed over the dark way."

"But what can lights on this river do for those who have gone?"

"You know, sir, that we bring our dead to this stream, and it is said that lights placed here will reach them in the dark beyond. Hence we always place these lights on this river."

As I stood watching the priest I noticed that he often turned and worshipped a little flickering light in the shadow of the bank, and I finally said: "Brother, what is this little light?"

"That is my light."

"But what are you doing with it?"

"I am worshipping it, sir."

"But, brother, why do you worship a little light like that?"

"Sir," said he, and as he spoke he stretched forth his hands and looked across the river away into the night with such a longing, hungry look—"O sir, it is all so dark, you know, on the other side, and we must all pass over, and we all want light. Hence, while we are sending out the lights for the hands who have gone, I am worshipping my little light, hoping that when my time comes to go I may get a little light by the way."

As I stood there and looked with him away into the night, I seemed to see the millions in bathed darkness looking

with outstretched arms into the future, pitifully crying, "It is all so dark. We must all go over. We want light by the way." And I saw a new meaning in the words of Jesus, as He commenced His work for our world, crying, "I am come a light into the world." What a longing, sad cry of the human soul Jesus answered—the proclamation of light for the world!—Christian Advocate.

Blissful Ignorance.—At the annual meeting of the Western Turkey Mission one passage in the Marsovan station report gave the words of a Greek villager who was delegate to the station conference when the amount of pledges from the native congregations was under discussion. He had given in the amount that his people would be able to raise, and it was seen to be a great sum for so small a community. One of the other delegates asked him how it was that these few and poor people were able to find so much for the needs of the church. "Being ignorant people," said the villager, "with no one to instruct us, we looked in the Bible for instruction, and we saw there that at least a tenth of our income must be given to the Lord Jesus."

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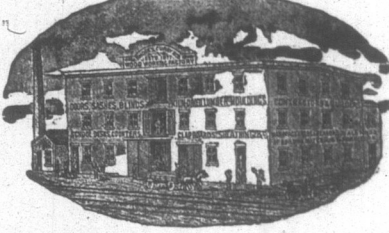
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