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BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1874.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, September 6th, 1874.

Martyrdom of John the Baptist.—Mark vi. 20-29.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter their own heart and their bows shall be broken. Psalm xxxvii. 14, 15.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 26-28.

SUMMARY.—When men have done their work, the Lord permits them to depart; but holds those who take their life for future judgment.

EXPOSITION.—*Introduction.*—Between this and the preceding lesson Mark relates the second rejection of Jesus at Nazareth, and his third circuit of Galilee. Also, that Jesus endowed the Twelve with miraculous power; and having instructed and commissioned them, they go forth, preaching and working miracles. It seems to have been in connection with this preaching tour of the disciples that Herod's attention is specially called to Jesus. Anxious, superstitious, and tortured by a guilty conscience, Herod concludes that John the Baptist is risen from the dead. This leads Mark at this point to give an account of John's imprisonment and death. He was imprisoned through the instigation of Herodias.

Verses 20.—For Herod feared John. This gives the reason why Herodias did not put John to death, vs. 19. We here get a glimpse of the deep impression that John had made and was making on Herod.

Knowing. John's character was not a matter of supposition, but of knowledge with Herod.

A just man and holy man; just, righteous, in his relations toward men; and holy, pious, devoted toward God.

Observed him, watched him closely, kept him in mind, observing his exemplary life. The word may mean *kept him*, preserved him from the designs of Herodias. Compare this use of the Greek word in Matt. ix. 17; Luke v. 38. Herod knew that John was a righteous and holy man; and he observed him strictly, noting his life, his acts, words and general conduct; and hearing him did many things and heard him gladly. This also implies that he protected him against the designs of Herodias.

Heard him, or having heard him, etc. He did more than merely notice closely his actions and words; *did many things* which he advised, and he even heard him *gladly*, with relish, with pleasure. He heard him like the stony-ground hearers, receiving the word with joy and outwardly reforming in some things, ch. iv. 16, 17. Like the self-righteous Jews, he was willing for a season to rejoice in his light, John v. 35. He was one who would save himself by his own works, and silence conscience with outward reform. But Herod was weak and vacillating. The constant influence of Herodias affected his mind; and truth, when it does not soften, hardens, so that, after a time, he was even desirous of putting John to death, but feared the people, because they regarded John as a prophet, Matt. xiv. 5.

Josephus (Ant. xviii. 5, 2), probably aware of no other ground of John's imprisonment and execution, gives only political reasons. He says: "For Herod slew him (John), although he was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness one toward another, and piety toward God, and so to come to baptism. . . . Now when others came in crowds about him—for they were greatly moved at hearing his words—Herod, who fearing lest the great influence John had over the people, might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause. Herod feared on account of the popularity of John with the people (Matt. xiv. 5); and he may have feared lest the people might be aroused against him through the influence of John, on account of his unlawful marriage. The reproof of John and the influence of the malicious Herodias were, however, the private, exciting and immediate ground of his action. Josephus also relates the adulterous marriage of Herodias, and represents her as an ambitious intriguing

woman; and that she had by her first marriage a daughter, named Salome.

Verses 21.—A convenient day having come for Herodias to carry out her wily and malicious design.

On his birthday. So Pharaoh celebrated his birthday with great pomp and festivity, Gen. xl. 20.

Made a supper or banquet feast. The supper was the chief meal of the day, taken toward or at evening, and often prolonged into the night.

Lords, high Captains, literally, commanders of a thousand.

The first men of Galilee; the chief men of the land generally. The Jews were accustomed to take journeys in attending their feasts.

Verses 22.—Daughter of Herodias, whose name, according to Josephus, was Salome, a daughter by Philip, Herod's brother. She was afterward married to her Uncle Philip, the tetrarch of Iturea (Luke iii. 1), and then to her cousin Aristobolus.

Having come in, possibly unexpected even to Herod, but contrived beforehand by the crafty Herodias.

Danced. The sexes did not mingle in the ancient dance. It was a sacrifice of decency and maidenly decorum; but Herod, and those with him, quite likely more or less intoxicated, were pleased, doubtless, with the skill and grace of her performance. Many modern dances are equally low, and equally pleasing to the sensual.

Them that sat with him, according to the custom of the time.

Verses 23.—Unto the half of my kingdom The case of Herod is only one of many examples of Eastern monarchs lavishing gifts on favorite dancers.

Verses 24.—There seems to have been no secret understanding between the mother and daughter. The latter therefore going out into the apartment of the women, which was separate of that of the men, consulted with her mother, Herodias, however, like one who was carrying out a preconceived plan, had a ready answer to her daughter's question.

The head, etc. Not the death only, for that would not have been strictly a gift, but the head, which could not be given her without his death.

Verses 25.—How willing and even eager the daughter was to adopt her mother's advice is seen by the fact that she came in to the king *straightway with haste*, and by the boldness and urgency of her request.

I will, &c., by and by in a charger, immediately on a platter. The Greek word originally meant a board, a plate, dish or platter of any kind.

John the Baptist, a person well known. The evangelists, without any explanation, thus speak of him, Matt. iii. 1; xi. 11; xiv. 2; xvi. 14; xvii. 13; Mark viii. 28; Luke vii. 20, 33; ix. 19. The title was evidently familiar to the Jews. Josephus also says that he was "called," or rather surnamed the Baptist. "He was indeed the baptizer, the institutor of a new ordinance, which had special reference to Christ. The earliest mention of baptism is in the Babylonish Talmud, a Jewish commentary of about the sixth century of the Christian era.

Verses 26.—The unexpected request of Salome produces a sudden change of feeling of Herod. He knows it is wrong; he is concerned for his own popularity among the people; he fears lest the people, who regard John as a prophet, may cause him trouble. Yet his sorrow was not sufficient to overcome his foolish pride and choose the less of two evils.

Duelists and gamblers act upon a similar principle. Herod had doubtless some scruples of conscience in regard to his oath, and one uttered so publicly. He did not wish to be a perjurer, much less to be regarded as one. Neither did he wish to be ridiculed as mean and fickle by his attendants and guests, who doubtless hated John and applauded the king in the generous offer he had made. Pride and shame overcame him. One sin leads to another, and Herod would not reject her. The verb translated *reject* means originally to put away. *Would not deal deceitfully or act perfidiously toward her.* To have violated his promise would have been treating her both contemptuously and treacherously. This gives us a still clearer view of Herod's false sense of shame and honor, especially as his drunken guests doubtless applauded the girl's bloody request.

Verses 27.—Immediately. No sooner does Herod decide upon the wicked and bloody act than he orders the execution.

One of the guard. One of his body-guard, who acted, as they often do now in

the East, as executioners of capital sentences.

Beheaded him in the prison. The narrative seems to imply that the prison was near at hand, and the execution performed at once; it would have taken a least two days for the execution of the sentence. It was night, and doubtless late, before the promise of Herod was made, and all was accomplished, we should naturally suppose, by or before the morning's light.

He had now been in prison about seven months, and it was now about three years from the commencement of his ministry. For the Passover was at hand (John vi. 4), the third of our Saviour's ministry, which began that year on April 17th, when the report of John's death was brought to Jesus.

Verses 29.—Brought his head, etc. The request was strictly carried out in every particular. The head was brought and given to this heartless dancing-maid, and by her to her mother, who was the principal actor and guiltiest party in this terrible tragedy. See ver. 22.

Verses 29.—His disciples. John's Matt. (xiv. 12) relates that after the burial they went and told Jesus, showing their tender feelings toward John, and their confidence in Jesus as a friend to their master, and as one who would sympathize with them.

Came and took up his corpse. Where it had been cast after his execution. Into one of the deep ravines beneath the fortress the headless body of John (Mark vi. 29) may have been cast, which his disciples took up and buried, and then went and told Jesus.

A tomb. The sepulchres of the Jews were often caverns, or vaults dug sometimes beneath the surface of the ground, but more commonly in the sides of hills, and cut in the solid rocks.

Abridged from *The Mighty Worker*.

SUNDAY, September 13th, 1874.—The Five Thousand Fed.—Mark vi. 34-44.

Youths' Department.

For the Christian Messenger.

A CHILD'S DESIRE.

I would come to Jesus
In my early youth,
Trusting in His mercy,
Resting on His truth.
Jesus, loving Saviour,
Hear my humble plea;
Let me share Thy favour,
Let me live to Thee.

I would follow Jesus
Closely every day;
I would call Him "Master,"
And His word obey.
Every task assigned me
I would fain fulfil;
Teach me, dear Redeemer,
How to do Thy will.

I would live like Jesus,
Free from every sin,
May His Holy Spirit
Make me pure within.
I would toil for Jesus,
"Strengthened by His grace,
Till in endless glory
I behold His face.

I would tell to Jesus
Every grief and care;
He delights to answer
Humble, fervent prayer.
Through the angelic future,
Jesus, be my Guide;
In Thy great compassion,
Keep me near Thy side.

I would trust in Jesus
All my journey through;
He is ever faithful,
He is ever true.
Saviour, in my bosom,
Shed abroad Thy love;
When I die receive me
To Thy home above.

March, 1874.

J. CLARK.

THE TWO MOTHERS.

A beautiful babe lay in his coffin. Death had come suddenly, and given no opportunity for disease to emaciate that little form. The face was full and fair, with a dimple in the chin, and a smile playing on the lips. As we looked on that sweet countenance, we almost expected the little one to open his eyes and begin his childish prattle. But a touch of that cold forehead and a look at the marble-like hands lying upon his breast was enough. We knew he was dead.

Precious words of Scripture were read, a few comforting thoughts spoken, an earnest prayer offered. And then a slight rustling noise is heard. The mother arises and walks to the coffin. She makes no audible sound, and sheds not a tear. Alas! She is blind. Yet she would see her child before he is carried forever from her. How often has she folded him fondly to her

bosom, and kissed his sweet lips! But she has never seen him. What would she give if she could have just one glimpse of her darling, that she might in the sad years to come be able to remember him! Back from her face she flings her veil, and bends over the beloved dead. But the sightless orbs cannot see him. And so she takes her fingers, which had so often and lovingly performed kind offices for her little one, and gently she moves them about all over that face and form. Slowly and tenderly she touches every part—the mouth, the chin, the cheek, the nose, the eyes, the ears, the neck, the forehead. Not one feature is omitted. Again and again she strokes the hair on each side of the head. The dress is felt, to make sure it is rightly adjusted. The hands are lifted carefully and laid again upon the breast. All this is several times repeated. And then—how can she help it?—she must kiss those cold, cold lids.

We weep in hearty sympathy as we behold that sightless woman leave her dead child. But shall I tell you of a spectacle more sad than this?

Another form lies in a coffin. It is that of a man full forty years of age, who has killed himself with strong drink. By his brutal conduct he long since estranged from him his loving wife and children. His habits have been so gross that his dearest friends could not live with him, or permit him to live with them. For years his life has literally been that of a vagabond. Every effort has been exerted to reclaim but in vain, and at length, in a fit of debauchery and despair, he has died. But there is one who has never forgotten him. How could she? Had she not nursed him at her breast? Did she not care for him as no one else could when, a promising boy, he grew so fast and so fair, and she had bright visions of his future usefulness and happiness? Does she not remember with what maternal pride she saw him start out in life? And has there been a day or an hour since when she has not thought of him? Alas! It may be she did not warn him in his early life against the destroyer, as she would if she had the opportunity again. But she loved him, watched him, and as a Christian mother prayed for him. In his erring years, when he was loathsome to all others, she never turned from him. It was the dollar she reluctantly and unwisely gave him which bought the last glass of whiskey that crazed his brain, and the bottle of laudanum which was found empty beside his bloated corpse.

A wretched funeral was that of the drunkard and suicide. A few friends gather. A few words are spoken. A prayer is offered. And then an aged one totters up to the head of the coffin. It is the mother. She is not blind. Ah! no, it would be a mercy just now if she was. She looks at that disfigured and brutalized face, and tries to distinguish the features of her once innocent and beautiful boy. They are all gone. Yet he is the same being. She knows it and feels it. He is her child. Would God she could persuade herself he was another, for this one is lost not only to her and society, but to himself, to purity, to heaven. How gladly would she, if she could, exchange places with the blind mother! She would rather have felt the face of her sweet babe, and gone all her days groping in the dark, than now to look upon this miserable wreck of humanity, and know that she is bidding her son an eternal farewell.

O ye, ye who have committed to your care the little ones, whether they are now in their infancy or early childhood, not only rejoice that you can see them, and that they are still spared to you; but be sure you consecrate them fully to God, and train them thoroughly for His service. —*Rev. Dr. Stryker, in S. S. Times.*

GOOD ADVICE TO CHRISTIANS.

1. See that your religion makes you a better son or daughter, a better clerk, a better student, a better friend, a better workman.

2. Do not set yourself up as a standard. Shun all censoriousness. Remember that each one "to his own Master standeth or falleth," and not to you.

3. Let nothing keep you away from the Saviour. Never be tempted to stay away from him by unbelieving doubts, by past neglect, or present fear, by anything. Be more intimate with him than with any earthly friend.

4. Never rejoice in your own strength. A child looking up to Christ is stronger than a strong man armed. Be resolute in looking to him alone for strength.

5. Show by your life what grace can do. There is no language in the world so eloquent as a holy life. Men may doubt what you say, but they will believe what you do.

Finally. Do not be discouraged if you fail in everything. If you were perfect, what need would you have of a Saviour?

THE SAW OF CONTENTION.

"O, Frank, come and see how hot my saw gets when I rub it. When I draw it through the board awhile, it's almost hot enough to set fire to it."

"That's the friction," said Frank, with all the superior wisdom of two years more than Eddie boasted.

"Yes," said sister Mary, who was passing, "it's the friction; but do you know what it makes me think of?"

"No, what?" asked both the boys at once.

"Of two little boys who were quarrelling over a trifle this morning, and the more they talked the hotter their tempers grew, until there was no knowing what might have happened, if mother had not thrown cold water on the fire by sending them into separate rooms."

The boys hung their heads, and Mary went on.

When the flames seized the great house of worship belonging to the First Baptist Church, in Chicago, brethren who had labored hard to save it, said one to another: "Our house must go, but let us have one more prayer within its walls." And they bowed before God in face of the coming flames, while one who had been wont to lead in the fire and thunder of battle led the cry of these faithful heroes before the mercy seat. Then, rising to their feet, they sang as they retreated:

"From every stormy wind that blows,
From every swelling tide of woes,
There is a calm, a sure retreat—
'Tis found beneath the mercy seat."

AUSTRALIAN LADIES AT CRICKET.

A cricket match of a novel description has been played at Sandhurst, with the object of swelling the funds of the local charities. The players were ladies, who went into regular practice for the match, and a local journal said, in noticing their proceedings, "the progress which they made was astonishing, for they picked up the points of the game with wonderful aptitude." A description of the match says of the lay cricketers: At first it was expected that they should play in the Bloomer costume, as being less likely to interfere with their freedom of movement than any other, but the innovation was considered too startling for a British community, and the idea was given up in favour of an attire of the ordinary shaped dress, made of calico, with a coloured jacket to distinguish the respective sides. These dresses the ladies purpose handing over as gifts to the charities. Everything being in readiness, the ladies—the one side wearing red Garibaldi jackets and sailors' hats, and the other blue jackets and similar hats—marched in pairs—red and blue being linked together—from the tent into the field, headed by the respective captains—Mrs. Rae, for the Reds, and Miss B. Rae for the Blues. Their appearance was very pretty and picturesque, and they were loudly applauded by the on-lookers. The Blues secured a total of 62 runs before the last wicket fell. After the lapse of half an hour the Reds took the field, and they put their opponents out for 83 runs. One innings each only was played, and victory, therefore, rested with the Blues. When the ladies had assembled in the booth, Mr. Abbott, chairman of the Hospital Committee, thanked the ladies for the successful effort which they had made on behalf of the charities. Mr. Rae, on behalf of the ladies, replied, stating that the ladies had thoroughly enjoyed the game, and had the utmost gratification in knowing that their efforts had been productive of a substantial addition to the funds of the charities.

Recently an officer of the London School Board was crossing Covent Garden market at a late hour, when he found a little fellow making his bed for the night in a fruit-basket. "Would you not like to go to school and be well cared for?" said the official. "No," said the urchin. "But do you know I am one of the people who are authorized to take up little boys whom I find as I find you, and take them to school?" "I know you are, old chap, if you find them in the streets, but this here is not a street, it is private property, and if you interfere with my liberty, the Duke of Bedford will be down upon you. I know the Haot as well as you."