

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1880.

SECOND QUARTER.

Lesson VII.—MAY 16.

THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

Matt. xxii. 1-14.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 11-14.

Jesus probably reached Bethany on the eve of the Sabbath (Friday evening). He spent the Sabbath at Bethany. On the first day of the week (Sunday) he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, returning at night to Bethany. The next day (Monday) he went again into the city and cleansed the temple, returning again to Bethany. On Tuesday, in the city again, he spoke with other parables, the Marriage of the King's Son, which forms the lesson. No parallel.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"As many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage."—Matthew xxii. 9.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. The Marriage Feast, Matt. xxii. 1-14.
 T. Wisdom's Feast, Prov. ix. 1-11.
 W. The Great Supper, Luke xiv. 16-24.
 T. Calls of Grace, Isa. iv. 1-9.
 F. Repeated Warnings, Luke xiii. 1-9.
 S. Rejected Calls, Prov. i. 20-33.
 S. The Last Call, Rev. xxii. 16-21.

PARALLEL TEXTS.

- With vs. 2: Luke xiv. 16; Rev. xix. 7-9.
 With vs. 3: Psa. lxxviii. 11; Jer. xxv. 4; Rev. xxi. 17.
 With vs. 4: Neh. ix. 17; Psa. lxxxvi. 5; John vi. 50, 58; 2 Cor. vi. 1.
 With vs. 5: Gen. xix. 14; Gen. xxv. 34; Psa. cvi. 24; Prov. i. 24, 25; Acts xxiv. 25; Rom. ii. 4.
 With vs. 6: John xv. 19, 20; John xvi. 2, 3; 1 Thess. ii. 15.
 With vs. 7: Dan. ix. 26; Luke xix. 27.
 With vs. 8: Matt. x. 11; Acts xiii. 46; Rev. iii. 4; Rev. xxii. 14.
 With vs. 9: Mark xvi. 15, 16.
 With vs. 10: Matt. xiii. 47, 48; John x. 16.
 With vs. 11: Zep. i. 12; Matt. xxv. 31, 32; Psa. xlv. 14; Isa. lxi. 10; 1 Cor. iv. 5; Heb. iv. 12, 13; Rev. ii. 22; Rev. xvi. 15; Rev. xix. 8.

THE FEAST OF THE KINGDOM.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. The Provision, Vss. 1, 2, 4. II. The Call, Vss. 3-10. III. The Guests, Vss. 11-14.

QUESTIONS.—In what city did Jesus speak this parable?

I. Vss. 1, 2, 4.—By whom does Jesus represent this feast as prepared? What was the nature of the feast? Give some account of Oriental wedding feasts. What preparations are specified in vs. 4?

II. Vss. 3-10.—Who were first called? What was this bidding? To whom sent? By whom? By what facts was it urged? What was the third call? Where was it made? To whom? On what grounds was it urged? With what results? To whom does Jesus refer in these three calls severally?

III. Vss. 11-14.—By what means was the wedding furnished with guests? For what purpose did the king then come in? To what event does this refer? Whom did the king see there? What was the wedding garment? What is the wedding garment of Christ's kingdom? (Rev. xix. 7, 8; Rom. xiii. 19.) What was this man's fate? What must be the fate of all out of Christ (John iii. 36.)

Topics in the lesson.—Parables; Oriental wedding customs; royal weddings; the kingdom of heaven; the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and the overthrow of their city; the calling of the Gentiles; highway and hedge work; the wedding garment; the outer darkness.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.—Verse 1.—Answered. In response to what had been happening. See chap. xxi. 45, 46.

Verse 2.—Marriage. Here used to include the various festival arrangements accompanying.

Verse 3.—To call them that were bidden. "To call those that had been called." The Orientals sent a preliminary invitation, and then followed this with a second summons, when the time arrived.

Verse 4.—Dinner. The mid-day meal, named as commencing the series of festival observances. My fallings. The animals fattened for the feast. To represent a sovereign as condescending to urge his guests to attend a marriage-feast given by him in honor of his own

son, would very vividly set forth the matchless grace of God in his relations with his creatures.

Verses 5, 6.—The remnant. Better, "the rest." Took. Translated, "lay hands on," in chap. xxi. 46. Entreated them spitefully. "Treated them with outrage."

Verse 7.—The king had invited subordinate rulers to be his guests. "Armies" would not have been necessary against mere private citizens, nor would such citizens have been honored with an invitation to the marriage.

Verse 11.—To see. To look at them as at a spectacle. Friend. A grave manner foreboding in its significance. A wedding garment. A practice, common in the East, was to supply invited guests on an occasion of this kind with apparel in which they should appear. See 2 Kings x. 22. This custom is presupposed throughout the parable.

Verse 12.—Speechless. "Shut as to the mouth with a muzzle." It represents the man as rendered unable by his situation to speak.

Verse 13.—The servants. "The attendants." Into outer darkness. "Into the outer darkness." Weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Greek might equally well mean, "the weeping, and the gnashing of teeth,"—an expression powerfully significant of woe, worthy of being called by eminence, the woe. The fullness of spiritual meaning in the parable begins to burst through the envelope of narrative.

Verse 14.—Our Saviour speaks with a weight of emphasis that belongs only in the spiritual sphere.

The king is God, the son is Jesus Christ, the bride is the redeemed and sanctified church. This latter point we gather from various Scriptures. See Eph. v. 27; Rev. xxii. 17; Solomon's Song throughout; Isa. liv. 5; and many other places in which the bond of marriage is used to represent the relation existing between God or Christ and his people. The marriage is the solemn festival which will celebrate the final and complete and eternal union of the church with Christ in heaven. See Rev. xix. 9. The "servant" of vs. 3 must be the first preachers of the gospel, John the Baptist, Christ himself, the apostles, the seventy. Their message was, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." This message was to the previously bidden—that is, to the Jewish people. The removal of the second invitation, in vs. 4, through "other servants," may, if we are to press it closely, be taken to mean the proclamation of the gospel which followed the sacrificial death of Christ. Peter's Pentecostal sermon is a good specimen. Vss 5 and 6 describe two classes of gospel-hearers; the indifferent and the violently opposed. The bloody deaths of so many early preachers of the gospel, answer to the representation. The anger of the king and the destruction of the city represent God's vengeance on disobedient and persecuting Jerusalem. "Both bad and good," imply that the invitation was no longer confined to the Jews, but was to be given to Gentile and Jew alike. See Acts x, which is a luminous commentary on this point. The expression cannot mean to teach that the church is to gather into its membership as many as will join it, without reference to spiritual condition. Coloss. iii. 11. The wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ—that is, the righteousness prepared and furnished by Christ to every believer. The garment we can have, by simply receiving it. To receive it, is to believe in Christ as my Saviour. That act of faith puts on me the wedding-garment. It is a gift on God's side; but the gift is to be taken on man's side. He will say to his "servants," (angels, see Matt. xiii. 40, 49) bind them hand and foot, and cast them into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. A terrible picture, and drawn by that loving hand! Of the many who hear the gospel, few are those to obey it and be saved. Yet, whosoever will, may. Behold the goodness and the severity of God!

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Select Serial.

Florence Walton,

A Question of Duty.

BY MAY F. MCKEAN.

CHAPTER XI.—MRS. WALTON'S RELEASE.

Slowly stern winter faded, giving place to genial spring, and still gentle Mrs. Walton lingered a little longer with her friends below, ready to go at her Father's bidding if that might be his will concerning her, or willing patiently to await his time. All knew and felt that this time must now necessarily be short, yet the sufferer bore every pain so submissively, and looked forward so hopefully as to a short journey, after which should be home, rest, and sweet enduring peace, that the deep shadow of the chill death-angel seemed robbed of half its darkness.

At first Florence had shrunk from the mention of the parting which she knew must so soon take place; yet, summoning all her fortitude, that she might not disturb the few remaining days of her dear one, she now spoke at least with an outward calm in regard to it.

"I had hoped, Florence dear," Mrs. Walton had said one day as she held her child's hand lightly in her own, that I might be spared to see you settled in life with some one to whom you could always go, sure of sympathy and help. Yet, since this is not God's will, why should I murmur? 'There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.' In whatever position in life you may be placed go to him for direction, and you cannot go astray."

"Think not of me, dear mother, though I know I can ill spare you now, my best, my truest of counsellors; and were I not quite certain that God's way must be right, I should be tempted to doubt the wisdom of this providence," returned the stricken daughter.

"Yet, dearest Florence, it may be for that very reason that I am taken now. Perhaps you lean too much upon my poor counsel, and now he wants you to look only to him. It is often so, my child; our feeble earth-props, that could not bear us if they would, are in great mercy removed, that we may learn to lean more confidently on that arm which alone is all-powerful."

"Perhaps so, yet I cannot think that I have leaned too much on one whose advice was ever for the right," sighed Florence.

"Well, whatever it may be, God's purposes are most good, most wise. Ever learn, my child, to trace that purpose in life. Never for one moment suffer yourself to doubt that Christ has an interest in his people here. Remember that when on earth he prayed for them, and 'not only for those disciples by whom he was surrounded, but for all who in after years should believe in his name through their words. Ever go to him, my precious child, even as you would have come to me, for 'as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.' And now, though you have no earthly adviser, yet I can leave you confidently in his keeping, 'for he careth for us.'"

Florence's heart was too full for utterance, and she mutely held the wasted hand in her own as she pressed passionate kisses upon it.

"Read to me, darling," said the mother presently—"read about the home I am going to; in the fourteenth chapter of John you'll find it."

Florence took the Bible, and sadly turned the leaves until she found the chapter indicated. Very slowly and tremblingly at first, scarcely certain of her own voice, she read those beautiful words of our Saviour—words which have carried comfort and peace to many a weary, stricken one; and now they brought comfort to her, for as she read her heart and her tones grew firmer, for she remembered that, after all, her mother would go but a little before her to the "many mansions," and that for the time which most intervene ere she too should receive the summons to go hence and join all her loved ones there, she would not be left comfortless; for had she not just here the promise, "If a man love me he will keep my words; and my Father will love him?"

That sweet peace which cometh not of the world crept into her heart even at

this lone hour as she confidently trusted in the love and wisdom of that Friend who would never leave her nor forsake her.

When she again looked up, having finished the reading, Mrs. Walton had fallen into a quiet slumber, a happy smile wreathing the dear lips so soon to be closed for ever.

Long and peaceful was that sleep. The clear sun drooped toward the western horizon amid the foamy, billowy clouds, and still she slept; but now, though her face retained its beautiful smile, the pale shadow of the cold death-angel seemed to rest upon it.

Aunt Grace came in on tiptoe to look at the quiet sufferer, but one glance sufficed; then she shrank into the farthest corner, buried her face in her hands, and wept convulsively—not so much for the tender love she had borne her sister as that the dread presence of death overawed her timid spirit.

Ethel saw that presence too, and would have fled at once to her room, shutting out from her eyes, and if possible from her thoughts, the unwelcome truth that death is the common lot of all, but that a detaining gesture from Dr. Ronselle made her resume her seat near the foot of the bed.

One other was present—Dr. Lyman, the devoted pastor, his good, kind face sorely grieved at the earthly loss of so faithful a worker in the cause of Christ. He had, indeed, entered too late to whisper of consolation, had any such been needed in this trying hour; but mayhap he was the one who should now receive strength in this, another example of the triumphant death of those whom Christ has undertaken to pilot across the dark stream.

Very anxiously the doctor bent over the wasted form. "I think she will not wake again," he said slowly as he pressed the weakened pulse.

"Oh Dr. Ronselle, she is not dead? My aunt is not dead?" cried Ethel in alarm.

The doctor raised his finger to silence the excited girl: "No she still breathes, though very weak. I may be mistaken; she may yet awake."

Then, as the sorrowful watchers breathlessly awaited any change, yet fearing alas! that no perceptible change would come, a sound broke the stillness of the room.

Lottie, the little waiting-maid, who alone of all that household was ignorant of any cause for immediate grief, sitting by the open window of her chamber on the floor above them, was exercising her one talent—singing. Her low, sweet voice, strangely well modulated for one who had received no culture, singing as she always did of late, with her whole heart in the words, rendered the interruption not altogether unpleasant.

Softly the tones rose and fell on the still air, and involuntarily the watchers listened:

"When my final farewell to the world I have said,
And gladly lie down to my rest,
When softly the watchers shall say, 'He is dead,'
And fold my pale hands on my breast.

And when with my glorified vision, at last

The walls of that city I see,
Will anyone then at the beautiful gate
Be watching and waiting for me?"

Then the dear one, so near death's door, aroused. The child's earth-song, beautiful as it was, sounded to her dulled ear as but the echo of heaven, for starting up, she pressed her child's hand close against her heart, while she exclaimed, as she fixed her dear eyes upon the glowing sunset,

"Don't you hear them darling? It is the angels singing; they are calling me. God bless you, my child! They are waiting and watching for me."

She sank back exhausted, though still straining her eyes to see the last rays of the departing sun.

Suddenly the song changed:

There's a light in the valley for me,
And no evil will I fear,
While my Shepherd is so near;
There's a light in the valley for me."

"Yes," she murmured. "A light; Jesus is that light, and it shines for me." Again and again her lips essayed to speak, but no sound escaped them. Then, as the sun sank down behind the clouds she closed her eyes once more, as if to sleep, but it was the sleep of death.

Ethel looked hastily from the pallid face, white as the snowy pillow against