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The Sabbath-School

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

First Quarter, Lesson 8, Feb. 19, 1899.

CHRIST FEEDING THE TEN THOUSAND.—JOHN 6: 1-14.

Compare Matthew 14: 13-21; Mark 6: 31-44; Luke 9: 10-17.

Commit Verses 9-11.

Golden Text.—I am the bread of life. JOHN 6: 35

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—Just before the Passover, April, A. D. 29. The Passover began that year April 16, about a year after the last lesson.

Place.—The plain of Butaiha, belonging to Bethsaida (Luke 9: 10), a "desert"; i. e. an uninhabited place, a short distance southeast of Bethsaida, on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee.

John the Baptist had been beheaded a short time before, in March.

Jesus.—Aged between 32 and 33 years; just beginning the last year of his ministry.

Rulers.—Tiberius Caesar, emperor of Rome (16th year); Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea (3rd year); Herod Antipas, of Galilee and Perea (33rd year); Herod Philip, of Trachonitis, etc. (33rd year).

SUBJECT: THE STORY OF THE MIRACULOUS LOAVES.

SEEKING SOLITUDE AND REST.—V. 1. After these things. For a year since our last lesson Jesus had been busy. He was teaching and healing, laying down principles, choosing and training his disciples, and building the foundation of his kingdom. The events are recorded in Matt. 4: 12 to 14: 12; Mark 1: 14 to 6: 29; Luke 4: 14 to 9: 9. Toward the last the apostles were sent all over Galilee to preach and to heal. Then suddenly, like a flash from a far-distant cloud, came the news that John the Baptist had been beheaded. The disciples hastened to Jesus, probably at Capernaum, and all retired across the Sea of Galilee to the lonely plain at the foot of the hills near Bethsaida, just outside of Herod's dominions.

They needed this retirement (1) for physical rest; (2) for instruction in review of their labors; (3) for communion with God; (4) for that wider and truer view of their work which comes from seeing it as a whole.

In the excitement Herod might seek to imprison or murder Jesus and his disciples, who were equally with John opposed to Herod's crimes. Jesus saw his own fate foreshadowed in that of John. And there was danger of a political revolt, which was entirely contrary to the plans and purposes of Jesus. Probably he was having another fierce battle with the tempter like that recorded in the third temptation, for he spent a large part of the next night alone in prayer upon the mountain side (Matt. 14: 23).

THE GATHERING OF THE MULTITUDES.—Vs. 2, 4. And a great multitude followed him. Probably early in the morning. They flocked from all directions.

Two reasons are given for the greatness of the crowd. (1) That the passover was nigh. The great roads to Jerusalem passed near the head of the lake. These were thronged with pilgrims from all parts of the north, and many had leisure to stop over a day and see and hear Jesus. (2) Because they saw his miracles. Signs of God's presence, and power, and love; evidences of Jesus' divine mission, and the truths that he taught. But the attraction was not merely curiosity and wonder, but also a semi-consciousness that Jesus could help them in the needs of their souls.

WHAT JESUS DID ON THIS BUSY DAY.—V. 3. There he sat with his disciples. In the usual posture of teaching. Here they could rest, and report more fully what they had done the evangelizing tour from which they had just returned; could talk over their plans, their successes, their mistakes, and receive instruction as to the true way of preaching the gospel, and as to the gospel they should preach.

When Jesus saw the multitudes he was filled with compassion for them, and came forth from his retreat, and welcomed them weary as he was. He went among the crowds and healing them that had need of healing. He was showing what his kingdom meant for suffering humanity.

THE MULTITUDES WEARY AND HUNGRY.—V. 5. When Jesus then. This was towards evening. Saw a great company come unto him. He took the whole in at one view. He saw them as "sheep without a shepherd" while there were green pastures and still waters for them if they would follow the true Shepherd. They were hungry in body and soul. It was a picture of the whole world he had come to save.

A CONFERENCE BETWEEN JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES.—Vs. 5-9. He saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

And this he said to prove him. Not for advice, but to test Philip's faith; whether he had such faith in Jesus as the Messiah as to believe that he could supply the multitude with food, as Moses did the Israelites in the wilderness with manna, or as Elijah supplied the widow of Zarephath. Two hundred pennyworth. The penny was a silver coin, a little larger than an English sixpence, worth about seventeen cents. The whole would therefore amount to \$34.00. Barley loaves. Or round, flat cakes like large crackers. Barley was the poorest food of the people. Two small fishes, meaning the small and generally dried or pickled fish eaten with bread, like our "sardines." Millions were caught in the lake.

THE MIRACULOUS SUPPLY.—Vs. 10, 11. Make the men, the people, including women and children, sit down, in ranks for the convenient distribution of the food. Much grass. The grass would be luxuriant at this time of the year. So the men, as distinguished from the women and children. Five thousand. This could easily be known from the orderly arrangement. The women and children are separated from the men in all Eastern assemblies. And Jesus took the loaves. That it might be known whence the supply came. And when he had given thanks. Thus recognizing the Giver of all goods. He distributed to the disciples, the divine gifts were conveyed through human instrumentality. Doubtless the faith of the disciples was severely tried when they were required to advance each man to his separate hundred with his morsel of bread. As much as they could. No one went away hungry.

GATHERING UP THE FRAGMENTS.—Vs. 12, 13. Gather up the fragments. The pieces that remained unconsumed. That nothing be lost. This was a lesson in thrift. It was also an object lesson of truth. It completed the proof of the miracle, for more remained than their baskets to begin with. Filled twelve baskets. The twelve baskets were probably the twelve wallets of the apostles, which they carried on their journeys.

LATER SCENES.—V. 14. The result was that the people were so convinced that Jesus must be the Messiah that they tried by force to make him their king. Jesus resisted the temptation and spent the night in prayer. The next day at Capernaum he met many of these people and taught them about the Bread of Life.

APPLICATIONS.

All workers for Jesus need seasons of retirement, meditations, and communion with him. No one can do the best work without these seasons. Jesus did not repel the people because they came to him from an inferior motive. He welcomed them however they came, but sent them away fed, healed, helped.

The hungering multitudes were a picture of the great world. They need eternal life; they are dying for want of the bread of life.

Jesus has compassion for the people. His souls long to help them. He has come from afar, at great cost, to furnish them with the bread of life.

Jesus presented the needs of the people to his disciples to train them for their future work.

The little lad with the five loaves, teaches that the young can serve the interests of the kingdom of God.

Jesus conferred great privilege on the disciples in making them the instruments of conferring his bounty.

When we give freely what God gives us, when we as individuals and churches distribute to others the blessings God bestows, we shall find that more is left than we received at first. A missionary church doing most and giving most for the heathen is most prosperous at home in all spiritual usefulness. Individuals will find the same rule holding true. They gain spiritual life by imparting.

Let nothing be wasted or lost in God's work. Using well or wasting the fragments of time, of opportunity, the nooks and corners of life, makes all the difference between success and failure.

JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE. This is the great truth which Jesus himself taught from this miracle. As he fed the body, so he could feed the soul.

The Wit of Preachers.

Preachers as a rule are great admirers of humor, and are often themselves among the wittiest of men. As example is always preferable to precept, and as the value of a remark lies in its application, we here record some of the wittiest, of clergymen.

The wit of the late Mr. Spurgeon was always clean cut, as witness these few instances. Addressing his students he used to give them sound advice as to their work; on one occasion he told them to put plenty in their sermons. After hearing some discourses, he went on,

I have been reminded of the farmer boy's request—Missus, I wish you'd let that chicken run through this broth once more! At another opportunity he warned them not to select texts out of keeping with the occasion on which they were to preach, and then he pointed the moral and adorned the tale. One brother, he said, preached on the loss of a ship with all hands on board. So he bringeth them to their desired haven, and another, returning from his honeymoon based his remarks on The troubles of my heart are enlarged. Oh, bring me out of my distress!

Archbishop Magee, of York, was famed for his eloquence and also for his witty repartee, as witness this. He saw the way things were tending, and, in giving his suffragan, the Bishop of Hull, a few words of warning as to his future, said—They will send for you to open churches, cemeteries, schools, windmills, clocks, vestries, and cloak-rooms, and before long the clergy will want you to come and open an umbrella.

A clergyman lost his wife, and on her tombstone had inscribed:—The light of my eyes has gone out. A few years flew by and the late lamented husband took unto him self another wife. Strolling past the first wife's grave the attention of a high dignitary of the church, noted for his epigrammatic wit, was drawn to it, and he asked what would be a suitable addenda to the inscription on the stone under the altered circumstances. Quick as thought came the reply, I should make the inscription read thus—The light of my eyes has gone out, but I have struck another match!

Here we must cry Halt! but from the foregoing illustrations it may be gathered that gentlemen of the cloth are not the dry-as-dust kind of folk they are often said to be, but are mostly the embodiment of wit.—Dom. Presbyterian.

What is a Sunday-School for?

BY HATTIE A. COOLEY.

What is a Sunday school for? Not a purpose, not one or some of the purposes, but the purpose, of the Sunday school; something pre-eminently the motive, and indicative of a result above all others the one to be attained.

Negatively, the purpose is not that of a place of entertainment for the young; and yet, was there ever I wonder, a successful primary teacher, who was not, in the highest sense of the word, entertaining?

Neither is it the purpose of the Sunday school to furnish a modern lyceum for debating among the older classes; and yet, surely, here, of all places, ought to be where, with the utmost freedom, honest human opinion on the most important of all subjects can be brought to be measured and corrected, not by other human opinion, but measured and corrected by the idea of those holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, it is a matter of small moment to us now what the original purpose in the mind of Robert Raikes may have been at the time of the establishment of the first Sunday-school. The question which concerns us is, to-day, under existing circumstances, What, or what ought to be, the purpose of the Sunday school?

Surely it can be no other than, to sum it all up into one grand epitome, such a study of God's word that this word shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that whereunto he has set it.

This means such a study of both Old and New Testaments that the knowledge so gained shall be an inspiration to faith in Him who is the beginning and the end of both. It means such an investigation of God's dealing with the children of men throughout the ages that trust in him shall be perfected, and human wills be subjected gladly freely, to his divine purposes. It means such a deep searching into the underlying principle of love underneath all God's commands that duty shall be lost in privilege, and obedience in pleasure, seeing all is for our good, since in that accomplishment shall he himself be glorified.

This will be also such a study of God's personality, as revealed by himself, that hearts, be they of old or young, shall be drawn instinctively to love him for what he is as well as for what he does for the children of men. It will go on to such a laying hold and assimilation of his promises that the burden of a lay relief and the sorrowful comfort. It will include such a turning of the search light of revelation into hidden motive, as a non outward action, that lives shall be inspired to noble being and a more zealous doing. First and last, then, it will be such a study of what Jesus was and is, that bodies, souls, and spirits shall be updrawn to him in a faith and love whose end is life eternal.—S. S. Times.

Teaching.

What is teaching? It is playing the part of a teacher without doing a teacher's work. It is sitting in the teacher's chair, going through the forms of teaching, without imparting anything, without throwing one gleam of light on the subject or awakening one spark of interest in the scholar. Automatic action will not answer in teaching. There must be life. There must be real thought, imagination, feeling. The mind of a teacher should be illuminating. It should flash such a ray of light, warm light, upon the lesson that the pupil cannot help opening his eyes to it and seeing it in noonday clearness.

Teaching and not teaching, is needed demanded in the Sunday school. The new and larger realization of the teacher's function calls for it. Sunday school teaching is not an order of teaching that calls for less ability and training or that affords less opportunity than other forms of teaching. It holds its own in importance with the public school or the professor's chair. It is a high calling to be a Sunday school teacher. If the contact with the scholar were as continuous as that of the school teacher, the influence exercised would be even greater. For the truth presented is higher and more vital. The character of the work of the Sunday school teacher and the influence exerted is on the same plane exactly with that of the minister. Often the Sunday school teacher has a much greater effect in molding character than the minister.

The church has not sufficiently exalted the office of Sunday-school teacher. The church has allowed its Sunday school teachers to go unrewarded, unappreciated, unthanked. She has put no premium upon their services. The teachers in that primordial Sunday school of Robert Raikes were paid. In our Sunday schools to-day they are too often not thanked. The Master praises; the more reason that the church should do the same. A return to Robert Raikes' payment practice may not be desirable, but a more generous appreciation of its Sunday school teachers on the part of the church certainly is called for. This in itself will help bring out the teaching faculty which is so much needed.

Let the church find out its members who are gifted with the ability to teach, train them by some kind of a normal course if possible, and then, when they are in the harness and doing good work, let their service be recognized and honored.—John Wright Buckham, in Pilgrim Teacher.

Bad Bargains.

A Sabbath school teacher once remarked that he who buys the truth makes a good bargain, and inquired if any scholar recollected an instance in Scripture of any one making a bad bargain.

I do, replied a boy. Esau made a bad bargain when he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage.

A second said, Judas made a bad bargain when he sold his Lord for thirty pieces of silver.

A third replied, Ananias and Sapphira made a bad bargain when they sold their land and then told Peter a falsehood about it.

A fourth observed, Our Lord tells us that he makes a bad bargain who, to gain the whole world, loses his own soul.—Children's Friend.

Praying on God's Side of the Fence.

When a boy, said a prominent member of a church, I was much helped by Bishop Hamline, who visited a house where I was. Taking me aside the Bishop said: When in trouble, my boy, kneel down and ask God's help; but never climb over the fence into the devil's ground, and then kneel down and ask help. Pray from God's side over the fence. Of that, said he, I have thought every day of my life since. Continuing, he remarked, Sanford Cobb, the missionary to Persia, helped me in another way. Said he: Do you ever feel thankful when God blesses you? Always. Did you ever tell him so? Well, I don't know that I have. Well, try it, my young friend; try it, try it. Tell him so that you will hear it yourself. That was new revelation. I found that I had only been glad, not grateful. I have been telling him with grateful feelings ever since, to my soul's help and comfort. Epworth Herald.

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