

Sunday School Lesson

March 23, 1947

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JESUS' INTERCESSORY PRAYER

Lesson: John 17:1-11, 20-23

Golden Text: Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.—John 17:11

St. John 17 is generally known as Christ's high-priestly prayer. On the Day of Atonement the high priest prayed for himself, the priests, levites and lastly, for the whole congregation. The high priest's prayer was largely for forgiveness for himself and for the people. This element is lacking in Christ's prayer.

I. CHRIST PRAYS FOR HIMSELF—

"And now Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory I had with thee before the world was." Jesus in coming to earth to be our Saviour emptied himself of his glory but not of his Deity. This glory he always had until he took flesh. Now that his life's ministry is behind him, the burden of his soul is that the work of redemption should be successfully accomplished. Thus his prayer comprehends his death, resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

II. CHRIST PRAYS FOR THE APOSTLES

"I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." Christ's will for the disciples is that they be sanctified. Leading to this he prays: (1) That they may be one as we are. Things equal to the same thing are equal to one another. Jesus prays that the disciples' consecration will correspond with His. Heart purity is the basis for such a consecration. There can be no solid union with God or with one another, except through holiness of heart and life. (2) That they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. The joy that Jesus possessed was so deep seated that oppression, persecution, reproach and suffering did not disturb it. "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross..." (3) That thou shouldest keep them from the evil. As long as they had the carnal mind they had affinity with evil. It was therefore necessary that they be sanctified in order to be kept from evil. (4) That they also might be sanctified through the truth.

III. JESUS PRAYS FOR FUTURE BELIEVERS—

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." Note the burden of his prayer for us: (1) That they all may be one. His prayer for us is essentially the same as for his original disciples. Sanctified unity must be sustained through each successive generation if the testimony of the church is to be convincing to the world. (2) That they may behold my glory. We who live in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit are deprived of seeing Jesus as did the original disciples. If we are faithful, the prayer of Jesus will be answered and we will behold his glory. (3) That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them. "LOVE" is the badge of discipleship and by this shall all men know we are his disciples.

QUESTIONS AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

1. What are the 'three natural divisions of John 17?
2. What was the burden of Christ's prayer for the apostles?

March 30, 1947

JESUS LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE

Lesson: John 18:37-38; 19:10-16, 25-30

Golden Text: God so loved the world that He

gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—John 3:16

The judgment before Pilate occurred about 5.30 on Friday morning. Since the arrest of Jesus at midnight he has been spit upon, mocked, smitten, and a crown of sharp Jerusalem thorns put upon his head.

I. JESUS BEFORE PILATE—

"Pilate therefore said unto him, art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Those who conscientiously seek after truth will be led to Jesus Christ. Had the Jews known God as they professed to they would have also known Jesus. Had Pilate been desirous of an answer to his question—"what is truth," he would have received one. They who profess to love truth but reject the saving and sanctifying power of Jesus' Blood are definitely and certainly deceiving themselves. What a sad thing it is, that many religionists who make claims of wanting nothing but the truth yet deny the ability of Jesus to reveal the truth. Many people, Pilate-like, are trying to wash their hands of human responsibility, but such washings will not cleanse them of original or acquired depravity.

II. JESUS CRUCIFIED—

"Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus and led him away." This verse reads as if Jesus was a martyr only, but such is not the case. Says he—"I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Jesus is crucified because it is God's method of making reconciliation for the world. There is no other way of providing salvation that will redeem the lowest sinner and satisfy the claims of a holy God.

III. THE MEANING OF THE CROSS—

"When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said: It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost." This statement takes us to the very heart of Christian doctrine. The work of Jesus on the cross is complete, and provisionally all are saved: However, we are not actually saved until we partake or accept that which has been provided. A parent may provide food for its child, but the provision will be of no value to the child unless the child accepts and eats. Likewise Jesus has provided salvation for us through the cross, but unless we accept and make that salvation ours, through the indwelling Spirit, it will do us no good whatever. Further, the acceptance of this provision is not the end of probation, but on the contrary, it is only the beginning of spiritual life and service which really has no end. The meaning of the cross to Jesus was the giving up of his life to the will of the Father, and the cross in human experience can mean no less.

QUESTIONS AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

1. Was Pilate sincere when he asked the question—"What is truth?" What would have happened had Pilate embraced truth?
2. Why was it necessary that Jesus give himself up to be crucified?
3. What is the meaning of the 'Cross' in human experience?

April 6, 1947

THE RISEN LORD AND HIS DISCIPLES

Lesson: John 20:19-23, 26-29; 21:15-17

Golden Text: Now is Christ from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

I. Corinthians 15:20

Our Easter lesson concludes our study of

the Gospel of John. There are three distinct sections to our lesson.

JESUS FIRST APPEARANCE TO THE APOSTLES

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and saith unto them: Peace be unto you." Jesus had made his appearance to several others before making his first appearance before the Apostles as a group. This first evening after the resurrection found them together in a closed room discussing the events of the day. Suddenly and unexpectedly Jesus appears in the room. No door was opened or closed. They could scarcely believe their eyes for the reality of the resurrection had not fully registered. They were fully convinced when he showed them his hands and his side. Jesus did not conceal his scars to win disciples, but on the contrary he showed his scars in order to convince believers of his deity. If it required scars to convince men of salvation today, how would he stand?

JESUS' SECOND APPEARANCE TO THE APOSTLES

"And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you." We are glad that Thomas was present in this second appearance of Jesus to the Apostles. The attitude of Jesus toward an honest doubter is very significant and worthy of our imitation. Thomas had previously stated—"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Jesus took Thomas at his word and invited him to do that very thing. Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God." Thus the doubts of all the Apostles faded away and they became as new men.

JESUS' CHARGE TO PETER

"He saith unto him, Feed my lambs." This charge was given to Peter during the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples after that he was risen from the dead. The appearance to Peter was no doubt to confirm his relation to Christ as an Apostle after he had fallen from grace. Peter had denied his Lord three times and three times the commission is renewed. (1) Feed my lambs. Lambs suggest young converts who need special care, food and protection. (2) Feed my sheep. Sheep suggest adult Christians which need the strong meat of the word. (3) Feed my sheep. The commission is repeated three times to correspond with the three denials. It is significant to note that in each case before Jesus gives the commission he asks Peter—"Lovest thou me?" The first and second time that he asks the question he uses the strong Greek verb expressed in the command—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Peter replies using a weaker verb meaning human affection. In the third question Jesus uses the weaker verb and Peter being grieved and humiliated, replies—"Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus did not ask these questions to Peter to find out if Peter loved him for he already knew that he did. It was to teach Peter a lasting lesson in humility and reliance in Christ.

QUESTIONS AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

1. Those who follow Jesus will have scars, not always visible, but none the less real. Such scars are a testimony of discipleship.
2. Can any one tell us why Thomas was not with the Apostles on the first Sunday night of Jesus' appearance to the Apostles? If not, why label Thomas as a doubter?
3. Why did Jesus repeat the commission to Peter three times, and with what results?