

God's Way Out

"For Us and For Our Little Ones"

"Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."

Ezra 8:21.

Lesson 20. Jesus Opens the Way of Hope

If you have noticed, many great movements, often sponsored by fine men, are endeavoring to make the world a place of peace and prosperity for all. Read in this chapter of the principles laid down by the very Prince of Peace.

THE village of Nazareth lies in a great basin high on the brow of the most southerly chain of the hills of Galilee, the hills which overlook the great plain of Esdraelon. Probably Mary often went up on the hills with the boy Jesus as He grew older, and gazed out over the great panorama of Bible history displayed there before them, a panorama most of us would give a hundred pounds to see.

What an opportunity for her to impress on His active mind the stories told in the Scriptures! What questions and answers would pass between them! "What a long way we can see from this hill, mother!"

"Yes, my Son; that is the Great Plain of Esdraelon. That hill on the right is Mount Carmel."

"Oh, yes, mother! Where Elijah prayed for the fire to come down from heaven."

"Yes, and where he prayed seven times for the rain to come. Look! There is the Great Sea beyond, where arose the little cloud about the size of a man's hand." [1] "Oh! I can see a cloud coming out of the sea now, mother."

"Yes, we may have rain before evening. See, between us and Mount Carmel is the place where brave King Josiah was slain in battle with Egypt. And away on the left is Mount Gilboa where King Saul and noble Jonathan fell before their enemies, the Philistines." [2]

"Many kings of the Jews have been slain by their enemies, mother, haven't they?"

"Yes, my Son."

"I can see more hills right in front of us, a long, long way off, mother."

“Yes, those are the hills of Samaria, Jesus. When Thou art twelve Thou shall go with us to Jerusalem to the Passover feast. If we take the short road we must needs go through Samaria. But we like not that way.”

“Why?”

“Oh, the Samaritans are not good people.”

“Why?”

“Well--I know not, my Son. But let us be going. See there are Roman soldiers marching through the village. And there is Thy father taking a new yoke to the plough-man's house.”

Through Boyhood

So Jesus grew up in the home of the humble Galilean carpenter. His mother ever remembered His divine mission and instructed Him diligently from the scrolls of the prophets. The Boy, quick in mind and gentle in heart, took great interest also in the things of nature and the varied activities of the people around Him. He worked in the carpenter's shop, and as He grew to manhood became known as Jesus the carpenter. Though He was the Son of God, yet He spent twenty years at the carpenter's bench.

“He was not willing to be defective, even in the handling of tools. He was perfect as a workman, as He was perfect in character. By His own example He taught that it is our duty to be industrious, that our work should be performed with exactness and thoroughness, and that such labor is honorable.” [3]

When He Began His Public Ministry

Years passed, and the time came when Jesus must take up His public ministry. The Emperor Tiberius sat on the throne in far-off sunny Rome. It was about the fourteenth year of Britain. Almost thirty years had passed since the wise men had come to Jerusalem inquiring for the King of the Jews. Thirty years since the angel had declared to the shepherds that the Messiah was born. Suddenly people remembered those events as they heard that a new prophet was preaching by the river Jordan. “His name is John,” they said.

“Repent!” said this prophet. “Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” [4]

“The kingdom of heaven. Then where is the King?” People streamed down to the Jordan to listen to the strange preacher, a man clad in rough camel-hair clothes.

He spoke with mighty power, and hundreds came under his influence. "Who art thou?" asked the priests.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" replied John. [5] The next day excitement became intense when John saw Jesus in the crowd. For, pointing to Him, he said: "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world."

"I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him," declared John. "I had no knowledge who He was, but He that sent me to baptize said: 'The One on whom you see the Spirit coming down and resting, it is He who gives baptism with the Holy Spirit.' This I saw myself and my witness is that He is the Son of God. [6]

Is This the King?

Two of John's disciples followed Jesus. "Was John's conviction right?" they asked themselves eagerly. The prophecy of Daniel had foretold that the Messiah must appear at this time. John the Baptist had testified that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He declared this Stranger had been marked out by the Spirit of God--so filled with the Spirit that He would actually baptize others with the Holy Spirit. He bore record that this Man was "the Son of God" – "He must be the King!" came the conviction to the two disciples of John. They straightway began to accompany Jesus.

One of them told his brother Simon the great news: "We have found the Messiah." Then Jesus called Philip, of Simon's home town, Bethsaida, and Philip brought Nathanael, one of his friends, to Jesus. "Rabbi," acknowledged Nathanael after hearing the evidence for himself: "Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel."

What excitement arose! If this Jesus was the Anointed, the long-desired Messiah, the King, the Son of God, would He set up the kingdom at once? Would He depose Pilate, the Roman governor? Would He drive out the hated Romans? Would He lead Jewish armies out to conquer surrounding countries? Daniel's prophecy had pointed out that this was the time, the time when the Messiah should appear. Jesus now proclaimed it to the multitudes: "The time is fulfilled!" [7] He preached. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand," He declared. "Repent you, turn from sin, and believe the good news!"

The Kingdom of Heaven - Strange Principles

But those who expected Him to take the sword and fight for the kingdom were surprised when He began to explain what kind of people would be subjects of the new kingdom. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," He said, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [8] "Strange teaching, this!" thought the rabbis. "Blessed are the meek [the gentle, teachable]: for they shall inherit the earth," He continued.

"What a safe kingdom!" the listeners thought. "Gentle people do not inherit the earth at present."

"Blessed are the merciful," He said. "A kingdom of merciful people, what a change!" the thought went round. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God," He proceeded. "A kingdom of peacemakers, that would be like Paradise once more. Wonderful privilege!" the thought arose in many hearts. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God," Jesus went on.

It sounded like the spirit of Eden again. "Oh, make my evil heart pure," went up the silent prayer from many an onlooker. The Messiah pressed home to His hearers these principles of His kingdom: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. "That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." [9]

So He taught them again the law of heaven, the law of Eden, love to God, love to all men. When a lawyer asked Him: "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus replied: "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

"And the second is like unto it," He went on: "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." [10]

Clearing Away the Rubbish

The Pharisees and scribes, the religious teachers had smothered these principles of love under a host of minute exaction and evasions. The loveliness of the law of God was hidden by intolerable burdens.

"Honor thy father and thy mother," said the commandment of love. "Obey them in youth; succor them in old age or sickness if they have need." But these covetous temple-ministers taught: "If you say your money is 'Corban,' that is,

promised to the temple as a sacred gift, then you are released from your obligation to your parents." No wonder Jesus indignantly denounced them. [11]

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," said the fourth commandment. God planned the day as a blessed day of rest, refreshing, and worship, a glad reminder of creation and its God. "No," said the Pharisees. "It is not lawful to heal on the Sabbath; it is not lawful to carry the tiniest thing; it is not lawful to walk more than two miles all at one time. It is not lawful to pick and hull a few ears of corn if you are hungry; it is not lawful to chase a flea, because that is hunting. It is not lawful it is not lawful" until the Sabbath became an intolerable burden! [12]

No wonder Jesus smote off all these barnacles and restored the commandments to their rightful place, bringing blessing to mankind. To those who felt He was breaking the law of God He said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." [13]

The prophet had declared of Him, "He will magnify the law, and make it honorable." [14] And so Christ set forth the law of God in its loveliness, showing it worthy of all honor. Christ was a poor carpenter, and could well have used extra money earned by working on the Sabbath had He felt that such labor was right. But no! He would under no circumstance break the commandment of God. "As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." He honored the house of God. "Lo, I come I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart," he declared. [15]

Did He Really Love Mankind--and God?

As the people followed Him day by day, in crowded city thoroughfares or among the crooked streets and alleys of the Eastern villages, they saw these principles lived out in His own life. Love for man and love for God were clearly seen in His every action. He mingled with fishermen and carpenters, tax-gatherers and Pharisees, donkey-drivers, idlers, and beggars, and in His love endeavored to help them all.

Never in the days of youth had He worked any miracle, though wherever there was a need, He was there to assist and cheer. All His life He was like a bubbling spring of joy and happiness. Thus He teaches that we may be doing fully the will of God even if our daily life is unattended by any miraculous happenings.

But now His teaching was pressed home by signs and wonders which astonished the people. Miracle followed miracle until the whole nation was stirred. This, to the open heart, was mighty, incontrovertible evidence that Christ's teaching was of God. His first miracle was performed at the village of Cana, [16] five miles across the hills from His home at Nazareth. With His mother He had been invited to a wedding. The wine ran out, and it looked as though the happiness of the feast was going to be marred.

But Jesus asked that the big water-pots should be filled with water, and, behold! When it was tasted, it had miraculously become the best of wines. A lovely thoughtfulness it was, for the happy bride and bridegroom. May we imitate that spirit of thoughtfulness in all such seasons of rejoicing.

What Happiness He brought!

Wherever He went He took the spirit of Eden. When blind Bartimaeus of Jericho came to Him, Jesus spoke life to his dead optic nerves. His blindness disappeared, and joy beyond expression came with the beautiful light to the afflicted man. How Bartimaeus danced for joy! What a heaven entered his poor breast! "Oh, thank God! I can see! I can see! The dark has all gone. Blessed be the name of God!"

Yes, He gave light to them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. And the leper, loathing himself, shuddering at his own uncleanness, hopeless at its incurableness, he came before Him with his rotting flesh and his ulcers. Would this Man turn away with disgust and fear like the others? No, this Man had kind, sympathetic eyes. He stretched forth His hands. "Be clean!" He said, gently, authoritatively. The man glanced at his flesh, could it be possible! "They've gone! The scales have gone!" he shouts. "The sores have gone!" "The lumps have gone!" "Oh-h-h! Look at my flesh! Clean as a little child's! O God! Thank God! Thank God!"

And the leper falls to worship Him who has brought this heaven of perfect health again. Thus He taught also that the leprosy of sin can be fully cleansed away. In one moment, by believing His Word, we can be cleansed as if we had never once sinned. Jesus came to those who were suffering the agonies and madness of devil-possession, poor, unfortunate beings who had tampered with spiritualism until life had the semblance of hell. At His command the devils were cast out, and a heaven of relief and calm entered the poor distressed and tormented minds.

Yes, Jesus can bring the calm and joy of Eden into every distressed, spirit-tormented heart that calls upon Him. And if you who read these lines have

learned to trust in Jesus and to walk in His way, remember that your Savior loves you, and that you are safe in the hollow of His hand.

REFERENCES:

1. 1 Kings 18: 36, 37, 42, 44.
2. 2 Kings 23:29; 1 Samuel 31:2-6.
3. Desire of Ages, Page 72.
4. Matthew 3:2.
5. John 1:19, 23.
6. John 1:33, 34 (Basic English).
7. Mark 1:15.
8. Matthew 5:3-9.
9. Matthew 5:44-45.
10. Matthew 22:36-40.
11. Mark 7:10-12.
12. Matthew 12:2-10; John 5:10.
13. Matthew 5:17, 18.
14. Isaiah 42:21.
15. Psalm 40:7, 8.
16. John 2:11.

