

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 21. Into a Glad New Nature

Perhaps you have sometimes wished that everyone could be given a kind and helpful nature--like the Lord Jesus had. Read in this chapter how natures can be changed, the key to a great happiness!

ONE of the most startling events of Christ's ministry took place down below Nazareth, on the Plain of Esdraelon, in a village called Nain. Jesus visited this place with His disciples one day, and as they came to the gates, a funeral procession came out with a large number of mourners. [1]

It was the funeral of a young man--an only son--and, alas! He had been the sole supporter of his loving mother. She was there, the tears falling down her cheeks in her intense grief and loneliness as she thought of the dear one torn from her by the cruel hand of death. Aye, what sadness death brings!

But see! Jesus steps forward to the bier. The procession stops. The mother lifts her weary head--what official is this who rudely intrudes on her grief with some triviality? thinks she. But they are kind, compassionate eyes that meet hers. "Weep not," says a gentle voice. Her dumb sorrow and hopelessness are suddenly broken. What! What is this Stranger saying to her dead boy? No! Can it be possible? "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!"

"Arise?" - there is a sudden scream of joy from the mother. The dead man is sitting up! Oh! Now she has thrown her arms about him and is raining down tears of joy on that hateful shroud and on the bewildered face of her risen son. "My son! Oh, my son! He's alive again! My son! My son! Alive again!"

What excited shouts rose from the people! Everyone came crushing forward to see the man who had been raised from the dead. How they rejoiced with the mother! How they stared at the Man of God who could bring heaven to earth like this! Raised from the dead! This miracle was repeated in other towns. The streets of Bethany were riotous with joy when Lazarus was brought back from the grave. [2] Other towns buzzed with the news that the daughter of Jairus, one of the rulers, had been brought back to life.

A Token of Infinitely Greater Things

By raising up these from the dead, Jesus demonstrates--oh, here is the great revelation--that He can raise up all the multitudes of earth from the dead! "Yes," He says, "the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." [3]

Yes, Jesus showed that He actually had the keys of the grave and death. He will break open that Hall of Silence into which men have gone since the day when Abel died. He can conquer Giant Death. Every vestige of the poor body may have disappeared, but He will give them a new body, so that in their flesh they shall see God. [4] The dead know not anything. [5] No, but He will awaken the powers to glad understanding again. Their love, their feelings are gone. Yes, but He will awaken their emotions with the flowing current of life again. Till then, good or wicked, the dead sleep, a peaceful sleep which shall not be broken until the resurrection day. [6]

Who Teaches Like Him?

What a prince of teachers was Jesus! Has there ever been His like? Those who have endeavored to teach in the open air know how difficult it is to keep the attention of the hearers. Flowers distract, birds whistle and take the children's attention. Workmen pass, babies take the eyes of mothers. But Jesus taught the greatest of His lessons in the open field, on the green hillside, or by the Sea of Galilee. If the birds appeared, He called the people to watch them. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?" [7]

If the flowers attract some listeners, He says: "Consider the lilies of the field, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothe the grass of the field, shall He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" If a farm laborer appears, sowing the seed, Jesus says, "Behold!" and tells the forcible parable: "A sower went forth to sow." So all distractions were used by the great Teacher to enforce His teaching. He taught much by telling stories--parables. These aroused the interest and challenged the curiosity of His hearers till they understood deep truths they would never otherwise have attempted to comprehend.

Friend of All Mothers

Mothers, burdened with the ordinary, everyday cares of home and children, heard of this Prophet who seemed to understand everybody's need. They gathered their children one day and went in a group to ask Jesus to bless them. "No, He is too busy to see children," the disciples protested. "You must not trouble Him." But Jesus had caught sight of the anxious group, and He who understands every mother's longings and perplexities, will not turn anyone away. Not even the least promising. He will not turn our children away, even if there should be discouraging traits of character only too evident in them.

No, "Forbid them not!" He said to His disciples. Let the little children come unto Me--and forbid them not, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And He took the children in His arms and blessed them. No wonder the mothers returned home with happy smiles and laughter, repeating His words as they went! "He is the mother's Christ" every woman may sing. "And He is the children's Jesus!" Let every boy and girl sing it aloud.

Great Multitudes Follow Him

No wonder "the common people heard Him gladly." [8] Friend of all, they followed Him eagerly and talked of Him incessantly: "It's that Man with the kind face," says a little girl. "Yes, He put His hand on my head when He was preaching," responds a small boy.

"Think! He blessed my restless little Peter," says a grateful mother, looking down at her infant.

"He gave me my sight--bless Him!" says old Bartimaeus.

"Bless His name! He brought my son back from the dead," says the widow from Nain.

"O thank God, thank God!" a young woman from Magdala whispers; "He has wiped out the past. Now life opens before me again, pure and fresh as morning on the hills." He was the living exponent of love to God and love to one's neighbors--the principles of the kingdom of heaven and Eden. He showed the people that these virtues would bring peace and happiness into their own lives, into their families, and into the nations. Then could there be "Peace on earth; goodwill toward men."

If they accepted His teaching and did what He taught, they would be like a wise man who built his house on a rock. They would live in a renewed Eden for ever.

But if they listened--and even approved--but did not do these things, their house would be overwhelmed by floods. [9] Eternal death would be their lot.

Death or life? Which shall be our choice? Solemn question!

We Need a New Nature to Do This

"Oh, if only I had a different nature! I would love to live the life of peace and goodwill." Such was the desire that went up from scores of hearts, as Christ taught them. Such is the desire of thousands of hearts today. "If only I had Christ's nature! If only I had a current of His life, instead of my own unlovely impulses!"

If this is your desire, recognize it as the voice of God to your soul. His Spirit has given you this longing and will give you just this very thing--a new nature, the life of Christ. He will give it to you today.

Say good-bye to sin for ever--this is repentance. Turn your back on it for ever. Come to God with humble confidence. "Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out," [10] Jesus assures us. Every man and woman; every boy and girl is welcome.

Then, listen, "Verily, verily," Jesus proclaims: "He that hears My Word, and believes on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." [11] And again, He declared: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on Me hath everlasting life." [12] This is one of those "exceeding great and precious promises" by which men may "be partakers of the divine nature," as the Apostle Peter declared. You ask Him for this precious gift of life--His own nature. Take courage; He will give it to you. Believe that you receive it, now, as the gift of God. Believe Him, and receive this priceless gift just now. In giving you His own nature He adopts you into His family. You are counted now as a son of God--this very day. Rejoice in this.

Rejoice with the Apostle John, and say: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: Beloved, now are we the sons of God." [13] "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that you may know that you have eternal life," says His closest friend, John the apostle.

And remember that these priceless gifts; forgiveness and cleansing from every sin, adoption into His family, the gift of His own nature, His Spirit--which will bring immortality and a part in Eden restored--are all given freely to you. Not because of anything you have done, but as free gifts of the grace of God, because He loves

you. A free gift to you this very day, dear mother, dear fellow man, dear boy and girl. Turn from sin, and joyfully accept God's great gift.

How Christ Pictured God

All this Jesus explained in His most loved parable. [14] The son of a wealthy farmer grew tired of the fancied restraints of home, asked his father for all the money which would normally be given to him to start in life, and took his journey into a far country. There, in sin, he wasted his substance in riotous living.

But when all his money was gone, and there arose a mighty famine in that land, he began to be in want. To earn a few pence he took employment as a swineherd. So small were his wages, and the price of the food so high, that he went hungry every day. His clothes were soiled through contact with the animals. Filthy, ragged, hungry, his thoughts turned to his father. "Even the hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare," he burst out. "And I - I perish with hunger."

"My father!" Even the thought of him brought a ray of hope. "I will arise and go to my father. I will be one of his hired servants. He will not turn me away, I know that. I will say to him: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

He turned away from the pigs, the riotous living, the far country, and bent his steps toward his father's house. "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him," overflowing with emotion. The son stammers out the words: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants."

But the father's heart, overflowing with love for the son, would hear no more. He called his servants to bring the best clothes; to bring shoes for his feet; a ring betokening son-ship for his hand. That is how God loves you and me, my brother man. "Let us eat, and be merry," the father commanded. "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." Thus Jesus taught that all heaven rejoices as we turn to the Father's home and receive His love. Let us bend our feet homeward now, and rejoice.

Is This Right?

"But this is not justice," says Rabbi Hardface. "Simply forgetting a man's sins and misdeeds is not justice. If sin is not punished, then the law is a farce. People will

sin without restraint if no penalty is exacted from law-breakers. The sinner should pay.”

Yes, that is true. But if someone pays my fine for me at the court, then the law has still been upheld, but I am free. And if someone gives me the nature of the most law-abiding citizen in the land, then I shall never willingly break that law again. Isn't that true, Rabbi Hardface?

By our sins we have come under the death penalty of God's law. But Jesus suffered death on Calvary for us. He has paid the penalty, enough to cover the sins of the whole world. The money is immediately available to everyone who turns from sin and trusts in Jesus. In other words, available to everyone who chooses to take it. To you and me, this day. What condemnation will fall on us if we refuse God's great free gift and remain in sin!

Yes, Jesus died on the cross to atone for Eve's sin and Adam's sin. For David's sin and Peter's sin. For my sin and your sin. As we trust in this sacrifice we are forgiven. And at the same time He gives us His own loyal and loving nature.

This Is Part of the Restoration

Never for a moment did Christ forget God's original plan for mankind. Always before Him was God's Way of Happiness as shown in the garden of Eden. It was His great work to restore that which had been lost as a result of sin. Men had come to look on God as “a harsh and exacting creditor.” Christ showed them by His life how tenderly God loves the children of men. They had lost sight of the principles of Eden, of the kingdom of God. He taught these again: Love to God and love to one another.

They had come to regard sin lightly. Christ showed that it led to eternal death. Solemnly He pressed this home. They were in bondage to sinful habits. He showed that they could have His own sinless nature, or life, through trust in His Word. He taught them He would die in their place. He would be treated as we deserve, so that we might live forever on an Edenic new earth, and be treated as He deserves.

He told them that when this good news had been made known to all nations, He would come from heaven again, would raise from the dead His sleeping children, would change the living saints, and lead all of them to heaven, to His Father's house. [15]

He taught them that this earth would then be recreated [16] and the children of God would live in it for ever. Like a merchant offering precious pearls, so Christ

stood before the people offering God's great gifts. Multitudes believed Him, and accepted Him into their hearts with unspeakable joy. But another multitude took Him and put Him to death on the cross. Which course shall we take? The chief priests and rulers became jealous of Christ's popularity. They became angry when He discredited their lifeless teaching. They finally conspired to put Him to death.

He was given a mock trial by the priests, found guilty of blasphemy, and then brought before Pilate, the Roman governor. "This Man hath done nothing amiss. I find no fault in Him," [17] Pilate protested. But finally his objections were overruled and he delivered Jesus up to death on the cross. "The King of the Jews," was the inscription over Him. There are two hills of old Jerusalem, Mount Moriah and Calvary. To each of these, in his time, came a father with his son. Abraham, his heart wrung by sorrowful apprehension, brought his son to Mount Moriah as a sacrifice. To Calvary God came with His well-beloved Son as a sacrifice for a fallen world.

Abraham was delivered at the last moment, and he and his son were spared the anguish of death. God came up to Calvary with His Son, and went right through with it for you and me; right through the agony of separation and death. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that Whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It was a wonderful thing that God's own Son should come from heaven to die for you and me. He felt the torture of the cruel nails as the weight of His dear body sagged forward on them. He felt the pain of the crown of thorns and the burning shame of a criminal's death.

But most of all He felt what you and I would otherwise have suffered—the darkness of separation from the Father's face as others went into life eternal. You and I, at the great day of judgment, would otherwise have had the anguish of going out into eternal darkness and death, while at the same time glimpsing others going into the surpassing glory of restored Eden.

But now, through Him – "He that hears My word, and believes on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." He opens wide before us the door to a new life here, and everlasting life in the hereafter. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," prayed Jesus for those who rejected Him. He died - it was a cruel death - and was buried. But grave-clothes and gravestones could never hold the Prince of Life. On the morning of the third day, before the sparrows began to twitter in the

olive trees, the sepulcher garden shook and trembled as with an earthquake. A mighty angel came down, and Christ arose from the dead. [18]

What consternation and terror to the soldiers and priests! What joy for His disciples! They could scarcely believe their eyes. But He appeared to them over and over again. He ate with them. He told them He was going to heaven, but He would surely return for them. After instructing, comforting, and blessing His disciples for the space of almost six weeks, He led them out one day to the Mount of Olives. Here at His birth had come the wise men following the star. Ah, yes, the star!

But now there was a gleaming white cloud overhead! A cloud waiting! Was it heaven calling? With feelings of wonder the disciples saw that this earth's gravity had lost its power over their risen Lord. Slowly, with infinite grace and majesty, Jesus ascended from among them. Higher and yet higher He rose, His hands outstretched to bless them; higher, until that cloud, that white cloud, received Him out of their sight. [19] When will He come again?

REFERENCES:

1. Luke 7:11-17.
2. John 11.
3. John 5:28, 29.
4. Job 19:25, 26.
5. Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6-10.
6. Job 14: 12, 14, 15.
7. Matthew 6:26, 28-30.
8. Mark 12:37.
9. Matthew 7:24-27.
10. John 6:37.
11. John 5:24.
12. John 6:47.
- 13.1 John 3:1, 2.
14. Luke 15:11-32.
15. Matthew 24.
16. Matthew 19:28.
17. Luke 23:4.
18. Matthew 28:2.
19. Luke 24:50, 51; Acts 1:9-11.

