

SUNDAY SCHOOLS LESSON

LESSON II., JANUARY 8.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.—John 1:29.

Connection.—In our last lesson we studied the announcement of the coming of the Redeemer. Then passing over the birth and childhood of Jesus, the hidden years at Nazareth, the birth and hidden years of John in the wilderness, as made familiar by the other Gospels, we enter upon the beginning of Jesus' ministry as the Messiah.

John the Baptist was born in the summer of B. C. 5, six months before Jesus, probably at Hebron. His parents' names were Zacharias and Elizabeth, both of priestly descent from Aaron. John was a relative of Jesus (Luke 1:36). For thirty years he lived a retired, ascetic life in the wilds of his native land. Doubtless, during these silent years, he had been studying the ancient prophecies and watching the tendencies of the times, their sins and their danger; and, in communion with God, had seen the only way of safety. Suddenly, like Elijah or old, with an abruptness almost like a flash of lightning from a clear sky, he appeared "a burning and shining light among the hills of Judea."

His work was to bear witness to Christ, and prepare the way for his mission of redemption. John's life from beginning to end was heroic. His very willingness to seem a failure in order to be a success, and to do his work, was heroic. Seeming failure is often the greatest success. History has made immortal not only the men who have achieved great success, but those who have been worldly failures while achieving the success of faith, of courage, of righteousness, and self-sacrifice.

I. The Witness to Christ of John's Mission, as the Fulfillment of Prophecy.—Centuries before his coming, the prophets had foretold the Christ, the Redeemer. With divinely illumined vision they had seen him, and pictured, in wondrous colors, the glories of his reign. For ages these visions had been spread out before the Jewish people, and wrought into all their thoughts and hopes. But the beginnings were so small, so feeble, so different from their expectations, dazzled by the glories of the final outcome, that they were in danger of not recognizing the Redeemer when he did come, as the stars cannot be seen when the sun is shining.

But two prophets foretold a sign which would bear witness to his coming. Isaiah (40:3) pictured the work of one who should immediately precede the Messiah, preparing the way before him. And Malachi showed the forerunner coming in the spirit and power of Elijah.

John the Baptist exactly realized the portrait, and did the very things the forerunner was expected to do, and thus bore witness that the promised Messiah was at hand, as the morning star is the forerunner of the sun.

II. The Witness of John's Preaching.—Scene: The Wilderness of Judea. John preaching. Great crowds of all classes of men flocking to hear him. Multitudes baptized confessing their sins. Indications of great expectancy and excitement.

John's preaching was well adapted to awaken a consciousness of guilt, danger, and need. He denounced the sin of men to their faces. His preaching was of the "Thou art the man" order.

How did this bear witness to Christ? Jesus Christ was at hand with help for every one of these needs,—forgiveness for the guilty, victory for the tempted, safety for those in danger, food for the spiritually hungry, the water of life for the thirsty, guidance for the erring, comfort for the sorrowing, healing for the sick, new life for

the dying, hope for the hopeless, satisfaction for every need, "love divine all love excelling," for all. And just so far as John made them feel their needs, so far he made effective his witness to the Savior who could meet their needs with inexhaustible supplies.

III. The Witness to the Delegation from Jerusalem.—Vs. 19-24. Scene: At Bethabara. On the Banks of the Jordan. Here begins the historical story of the manifestation of the Word made flesh, as recorded by John. The Baptist had been preaching some months. He had baptized Jesus, as recorded in Matt. 3:13-17, and seen the signs by which he recognized Jesus as the Messiah (vs. 32-34). Jesus had passed through his testing by the temptations in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). The statements following the words "The next day" in v. 29 make this order certain.

19. "This is the record (the witness) of John" on three successive days. It was a time of excitement and ferment respecting the Messiah. The thoughts of the new dispensation were in the air, but with a confusion of definite expectations. John's appearance and preaching and great success had aroused even the rulers to inquire what it meant. "The Jews." Probably the Sanhedrim, as the source of authority. It was composed of priests, elders, and scribes, but they "sent priests and Levites," probably because John's father was a priest. "To ask him, Who art thou?" Not his name, but whom do you claim to be? For the questions of the people as to whether this reformer was the Messiah or not had reached their ears.

20. "He confessed, and denied not." As if he had been tempted to claim the honor the people might easily have been induced to bestow upon him, but "with earnestness, almost horror, he disclaimed" it. "He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of the Light" (v. 8). "The Christ." The Anointed one; Hebrew, "the Messiah," whom they were expecting.

21. "Art thou Elias?" Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah (Matt. 17:10; Mal. 4:5, 6). "I am not." Compare Matt. 11:14, where Christ says that John is Elijah. Christ speaks figuratively, John answers literally, and humbly, and in reply to the expectations of the people of a literal return of Elijah. "Art thou that (the) prophet?"

23. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness." He was the fulfillment of a prophecy well known to them. "Make straight the way of the Lord." He prepared the way for Christ, as in the Orient with its shifting sands and imperfect roads, there was anciently a straightening and repairing of the roads when the king was to travel over them.

The Witness. Not only was John's testimony a witness, but also his whole work of preparing for Christ.

The preparation of the road-bed witnesses to the fact that the railway and its trains are coming.

Preparing the wires witnesses to bling of stoves and lumber, witness to the coming building.

Preparing the wirest witnesses to the coming of the electric light, or of cars or telegraph or telephone.

IV. The Witness of John's Baptism.—Vs. 25-28, 31. 25. "Why baptizest thou then?" "They expected a general purification before the coming of the Messiah" (Zech. 13:1; Ezek. 36:25). If John was not the Messiah, nor the divinely promised Elijah and prophet, what right had he to call men to repentance, and ask them, the Jews, to join the kingdom of God by

a rite used for proselytes in becoming members of the Jewish religion and nation.

John's Answer. 26. "I (emphatic) baptize with water." The sign and symbol of the real purification, the preparation for the Messiah. "But there standeth one among you." At this very time, though you do not recognize him. He has been standing on these banks, mingled with the crowd, baptized in these waters, the one of whom I testified (27) "who coming after me is preferred before me," and who is so much greater than I that his "shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." The latchet was the leather thong or string by which the shoe or sandal was bound to the foot, and the untying it was one of the most menial services one could do for another.

28. "In Bethabara" (house of the ferry-boat).

V. Witness of John Pointing out Jesus to His Disciples.—Vs. 29-34. Scene: On the Banks of the Jordan, at the Bethabara Fords. Great Crowds. Jesus among Them. Approaching John. The Second of the Three Successive Days. 29. "Behold the Lamb of God." Jesus was so named by John, because the lamb was used as a symbol of the deliverance which Jesus brought. It is well worth noting that Jesus died for our sins at the Passover feast, and at the hour of the daily sacrifice. "Which taketh away the sin of the world." "To bear away sin is to remove the guilt and punishment of sin by expiation, or to cause that sin be neither imputed nor punished."—Tnayer's Greek English Lex. The work of Christ is to do this for the whole world, till all its sin is removed, and this sinful world is changed into the sinless Paradise Regained.

30. "This is he of whom I said." See last lesson.

31. "And I knew him not." Or, I also knew him not. I, like you, did not at first know him to be the Messiah. He now proceeds to tell them how he learned who he was. "But that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with (in) water."

32. "And John bare record." Witness. "I saw." Have seen, forty-two or more days before, when he baptized Jesus. The story is recorded in Matt. 3:16, 17; Mark 1:9-11. "The Spirit descending from heaven." Upon Jesus as soon as he had come upon the bank of the river after his baptism. "Like a dove." (R. V., "as a dove out of heaven.") "And it abode upon him." Pointing him out, and expressing the permanence of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

33. "And I knew him not." Did not recognize fully that he was the Messiah till this promised sign was given. Only by a divine revelation did he learn. "He that sent me." John was conscious of his divine mission. He was sent by God. "The same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost," and, therefore (v. 34), "this is the Son of God." God's own peculiar only-begotten son.

The Witness was (1) John's testimony entirely disinterested and self-sacrificing. He gave his whole life to bearing his witness to Christ, resisting every temptation to gain notoriety, and to make friends of the influential Pharisees. (2) It was the witness of facts that entirely convinced John himself. (3) It was the witness of a voice from heaven. (4) It was the witness of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. "It was the token that in Jesus are fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament with regard to the pouring out of the Spirit in the Messianic age, and especially to the impartation of the Spirit to the Messiah himself (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18), prophecies which describe the crowning glory of the latter days."—Westcott.

A man's business is just to do his duty; God takes upon Himself the feeding and the clothing.—George MacDonald.

You know what a man lives for when you know what he looks at when alone.

HAD UNIQUE DEVICE

BANK WATCHMAN'S SCHEME OF ROBBERY REALLY CLEVER.

Mysterious Disappearance of \$100 Bills Remained Unsolved Until Death of Highly Esteemed Employee—Was Never in Life Caught Napping.

The cashier of a bank in a western town discovered one day at balancing time that his cash was an even \$100 short. He went over his notes of that denomination, after trying to account for it in various ways without success, and found one of them was missing.

A minute search failed to find it, and the loss had to be charged up in the way such things are.

Some weeks later the same amount was missing again in the same mysterious way.

When it happened a third time—this after a long interval—the cashier was replaced by another man; not that the officers distrusted him, but they wanted to see if the presence of the new cashier would make a difference.

It didn't. The \$100 bills disappeared one at a time at irregular intervals, and no one could ever account for their loss in any way.

After this had been going on for a couple of years the night watchman, who was also the janitor of the bank, died. No one ever thought of connecting him with the disappearance of the bills, and the day after his death the local papers printed short obituary notices of his career as a servant of the bank, telling in how high esteem he was held by its officers.

Curiously enough, with his death came an end of the strange disappearance of the bills. No one in the bank, however, connected the two things.

Several months after the janitor's death the bank was fitted out with new office furniture, and when the workmen ripped away the woodwork of the cashier's desk the reason for the disappearance of the money was explained.

Under the sloping top of the desk was a steel plate suspended from its center by a piece of stout twine that ran through a ring and then led down between the framework of the partition to the cellar, where it ended at another ring caught on a nail in one of the joists.

A few moments of experimenting showed how the janitor had worked his highly original "graft." When he needed money he would open the empty cash drawer at night, lower the plate and cover its under surface with paste. Then he would haul it up under the sloping desk top.

The next day when the cashier was away from the desk at luncheon, which he always ate at a table near his window, the janitor would go down in the cellar, unhook the cord and let the plate, which was suspended directly over the compartment containing the \$100 bills, drop down on the top of one. The paste would make it adhere firmly to the plate, and then he would haul it up under the desk top. At night he could remove it from the plate at his leisure.

Of course, he ran the risk of having the cashier go to the drawer while he was working his device. But the janitor had studied the officer's habits so closely that he never was caught napping.—New York Press.

Giant Horse.

Oregon Queen is reputed to be the largest three-year-old filly in the world. She is nineteen hands high, weighs 2,260 pounds, is perfectly formed, a chestnut sorrel with silver mane and tail. She was bred and raised by Sol King, of Cornwallis, and was three years old on May 20 last. She is now owned by C. W. Todd, of Albany, who will exhibit her at the Lewis and Clark fair, 1905.—Portland Oregonian.