

Mr. Bryan's Bible Talks

TEACHING THE LAW OF GOD

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR SEPTEMBER 10 (Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5, 6, 8-12)

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

Then he said unto them, Go you, way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.

And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

For several weeks past we have been studying the lessons contained for all of us of today in the return to Jerusalem of the Jews carried into a long and bitter exile after the sack of their city by Nebuchadnezzar.

We have seen the great temple of Solomon restored by the friendly aid of Cyrus and furnished by the aid of Darius, and the city's walls rebuilt by the assistance of a third famous Persian king, the Artaxerxes of secular history.

We have seen the noble Ezra leading back and sustaining the second band of exiles. We have followed the indefatigable and resourceful Nehemiah as he erected the walls and organized the people even in the face of the weak-hearted within and the threatening enemies without.

The Jews are once more firmly established in their beloved home land; now the people are called back to worship and obedience; and we have Ezra and Nehemiah brought together before us on this highly important and impressive occasion.

"And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street (or the broad place, as the Revised Version has it) before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel."

There was unity among the people; all desired to hear the reading of the law. There had been disobedience and wanderings, repentance and punishments; now with one accord they sought instruction as to their duty.

WHAT OF AMERICA?

What if the same could be said of all the people of this great nation? Statistics show that more than one-half of the adult males in the United States are not connected with any church organization. Ten years ago the people of the United States were spending five times as much for intoxicants as for religion—five dollars were laid on the altar of the drink god for every dollar dedicated to God.

Ezra brought the law before the assembly and read therein "from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women, and those that could understand." He did not read to a sleeping congregation; "the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."

They were not so exhausted by the social functions of Saturday night as to be dull on Sunday morning; they were not so occupied with trial balances and plans for the coming week as

to be oblivious to what was being said. Having ears, they heard.

"And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." It was a very solemn occasion, as every occasion is that calls us back to fundamental things.

"And Nehemiah (the governor) and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people. This day is holy unto the Lord your God, mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law." It was a day for enjoyment rather than for weeping. They were told to "eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared."

THE INESTIMABLE VALUE OF THE LAW

And yet there are those who would discredit the Bible—who spend their years endeavoring to prove that there was no such person as Moses or that the books attributed to him were written by others—critics who see nothing extraordinary in the Pentateuch.

Instead of elaborating upon the verses suggested by the text, I venture to call attention to the inestimable value of the Law, the reading of which so impressed the Children of Israel nearly twenty-five hundred years ago.

The Christian faith rests upon the Bible. The Bible is either true or false; it is either the Word of God or the work of man. The Christian church must either defend it or abandon it. If it is not inspired, as it claims to be, it has practised an imposition upon the world for centuries. If it can be convicted of being an impostor of fiction which have not laid claim to inspiration.

It cannot be taught in a doubtful way with interrogation marks questioning its authority. If it is in fact the Word of God, the revealed will of the Heavenly Father, there is no other book in the same class with it. Those who accept it as the Book of Books will be interested in reading it and in bringing it to the attention of others.

A BOOK THAT NEVER WEARS OUT

Its use may be considered from four standpoints; first, the personal reading of it.

It differs from other books in that it never wears out. No matter how often one re-reads it, it is ever revealing new truth or giving new emphasis to old truths. Sometimes a single verse or a single word, will stand out as never before and become the basis of a life resolve or of a line of argument.

The Pocket Testament League is gaining a large membership by cultivating the habit of carrying a copy of the New Testament in the pocket for daily consultation. It is astonishing how much one can read in odd moments if he chooses so to employ his time.

Second, there is the study of the Bible in the home.

If parents regard the Bible as an infallible guide to life and conduct, they will, of course, bring it to the attention of the children. Here is the first test of genuine belief in the Word of God. A parent's interest in the child is the supreme concern because the life of the parent is reflected in, and extended through, the children.

THE HEART'S TWO ALTERNATIVES

President Roosevelt regarded his speech on race suicide as one of the most important of his addresses. He selected it from among all his speeches, up to 1906, as the one to be published with other of the world's great orations. Races, as well as families, survive or die out according to the children born. The general interest which society has in each new generation can never be as great as the interest which members of each generation feel in their own descendants.

If the heart controls the life, then religion, which controls the heart, must be the dominating influence and the Bible is the expression of religion in the Christian world. The children must learn the Bible and they must learn it while they are children.

Science tells us that nature abhors a vacuum; there is likewise no vacuum in the moral world. The heart that is not filled with religion is filled with irreligion. No one can grow to manhood

or womanhood in a Christian country without accepting or rejecting belief in God.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL'S FUNCTION

Third, but while the home is the first nursery for religion, it is not the only place where the Bible should be taught. The Sunday School comes next. Though less than two hundred years old, it has become a large and permanent factor in the training of children.

Some have expressed a fear that it has been substituted for home training. It should not be; the training of the Sunday School should be added to the training of the home, not substituted for it. If there is less home training than there should be, the remedy is not to abandon the Sunday School, but to stimulate the study of the Bible at home.

The Bible class is a distinct advance in the encouragement of study of the Bible by adults. Within the last few years there has been a notable growth in men's Bible classes. I have recently been brought into contact with three.

In one city of less than one hundred thousand there is a Bible class with an enrollment of twelve hundred and an average attendance of about six hundred. In a city of less than ten thousand there is a Bible class of three hundred fifty, with other Bible classes that bring the total enrollment up to seven hundred. The attendance has been doubled in two years and the whole moral tone of the town has been improved.

In another town of less than fifteen hundred there is a men's Bible class of over three hundred, nearly all railroad men. The meetings are held on Thursday night and the teacher is superintendent of a division of the road.

Fourth, the subject of Bible study in the day schools is being discussed in many states. Local conditions so largely influence public opinion on this subject that no national rule can be laid down. Sometimes religious differences in a community are such that agreement upon Bible teaching is difficult. In some places the problem has been solved by a plan which permits Bible instruction by different groups, each group supplying its own instruction—all the groups being afforded equal opportunity.

The lesson focuses attention upon the importance of Bible instruction; out of the discussion will come some plan which will adjust itself to local conditions—a plan which will supply an universal need by entwining spiritual enlightenment with intellectual development.

"WILL A MAN ROB GOD?"

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR SEPTEMBER 17 (Malachi III:7-18)

Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye, said, Wherein shall we return?

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.

Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.

Bring ye tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts.

And all nations shall call you blessed; for ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts.

Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?

Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?

And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.

Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

He is numbered among the minor prophets, but in the four short chapters that constitute the closing book of the Old Testament, Malachi brings us one of the most vital messages that we can study.

The burden of his message was the dis-