

Mr. Bryan's Bible Talks

THE GRACE OF GRATITUDE By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR FEBRUARY 4 (Luke 17:11-19)

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.

And he fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?

There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

Nine short verses in Luke, recording Christ's healing of the ten lepers while on His way to Jerusalem for His crucifixion, deal with the very prevalent sin of ingratitude and bring to us a practical lesson with a searching inquiry.

Ingratitude has been characterized as a meaner sin than revenge because, while revenge is the repayment of evil with evil, ingratitude is the repayment of good with evil.

Every poet and every prose writer has exhausted epithet on those guilty of this sin. The indictment given by Shakespeare is probably the one most quoted:

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child."

Young puts it above all other sins:

"He that is ungrateful has no guilt but one;
All other crimes may pass for virtues in him."

Christ, who laid bare every sin that wraps human character and puts a blot on human life, has given us the most stinging rebuke ever administered to ingratitude.

His question, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" "But where are the nine?" has echoed through nineteen centuries and is as much needed today as when it was spoken.

If the ten lepers had been afflicted with a disease easily cured, the case would not have been so strong. But leprosy was incurable. (It is even today one of the most hopeless of diseases and appeals to the sympathy of the Christian world. We have an American society, known as the Mission to the Lepers, which cares for many thousands of unfortunates, and our government has recently made an appropriation for the care of lepers.) And yet when Christ had healed them all only one returned to give expression to his thanks. Is gratitude manifested by all today?

The Bible is a mirror in which we see ourselves just as we are. Attention has often been called to the fact that it is the only book that offers no flattery to sinful man. Because it contains a faithful inventory of man it has been attacked as no other book, and for a longer time. One cannot read the account of the nine ungrateful lepers without examining himself; and who can examine himself without being conscious of his own ingratitude?

On Thanksgiving Day we are wont to assemble at church or in the home to give expression to gratitude for bountiful crops and other material benefits, for the enlightened government under which we live, and for the blessings of peace. But have we ever attempted to set down all the things for which we should be thankful?

Let us consider first what may be called providential blessings—those for which neither we nor our immediate ancestry are responsible.

Man comes into this world without his own volition; he has nothing to say as to the age in which he shall be born, as to the race of which he shall be a member, or as to the land in which he shall first see the light. Have our hearts been lifted up in gratitude to God for birth in the greatest of all ages and in the most blessed of all lands?

What is it worth to live now instead of a

thousand or two thousand or five thousand years ago? Of what value is citizenship in this land as compared with citizenship in other lands?

And who shall estimate the benefits that came to us from being members of a race with centuries of civilization back of it? Not all of the billion and half who live upon the globe today are so fortunate.

GRATITUDE FOR CLEAN BLOOD

How, too, shall we estimate the value of a fortunate family environment? Next to heredity the greatest molding influence is the home life during childhood.

What is it worth to have clean blood that carries with it none of the diseases that follow in the wake of immorality?

Of what worth is it to have impressed upon us from the very beginning the lessons of purity, truthfulness and honesty, and to have implanted in our hearts ideals that make for character and noble living?

If we have education, it is because people long since dead established our school system, with universal education as the national ideal.

We are not only indebted to former generations, but we are indebted to those who were about us in our youth—who built school houses and trained teachers so that education came to our lives as the air enters our lungs.

Education is so largely dependent upon others that it is a gift rather than an accomplishment—at least, the earlier part of our education which we receive before we are old enough to decide such matters for ourselves. Are we grateful and do we show our gratitude by a determination to pay back the debt we owe?

When we finish school, do we count the cost to others and appreciate the sacrifice endured by those who made our education possible?

Do we resolve to discharge the obligation by making the world better for those of our generation and for those who come after us?

What is the ratio between those who manifest gratitude in their lives and those who, like the ten lepers, enjoy but make no return?

Some even plot against the public and use against their fellowmen the very training that the public has, through education, given them.

President Roosevelt complained to a Harvard Law School class that there was scarcely a great conspiracy against the public welfare that did not have Harvard brains behind it.

He need not have gone to Harvard to utter this terrific indictment against college graduates; he might have gone to Yale or Columbia, or Princeton, or to any other great university, or even to smaller colleges.

President Wilson spoke on the same line:

"The great voice of America does not come from seats of learning. It comes in a murmur from the hills and woods, and the farms and factories and the mills, rolling on and gaining volume until it comes to us from the homes of common men. Do these murmurs echo in the corridors of our universities? I have not heard them."

Wendell Phillips uttered the same complaint when he said that the people "make history" while the scholars only "write" it and that, partly and part as colored by their prejudices.

OUR DEBT TO RELIGION

And how is it in religion?
Have we not benefited by a Christian civilization?

Who will measure the debt we owe to the Bible, to the Bible's God and the Bible's Christ?

What is salvation worth to the sinner and what are Christ's example and moral code worth to those who would be perfect even as the Heavenly Father is perfect?

What percentage of the church membership is really active?

How many of our young men and young women, returning from college, offer themselves for church work and seek on opportunity to prove by service their gratitude for what Christ has brought into their lives?

What evils are being attacked in the name of the Master?

How many Christians are so living that they can ask the question in which are embodied the first recorded words of the Saviour, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

Space does not permit an enumeration of all

the blessings which we enjoy, but even a short list ought to include the benefits that come to us because we live under a government in which the people rule.

Our liberties constitute a priceless gift, bought for us by the blood of others. It is because millions of the best and bravest who ever lived poured out their lives that we are free.

We are the heirs of the ages and debtors to all who have from time to time protected and developed popular government. What evidence do we give of deep appreciation?

OUR DEBT TO OUR COUNTRY

How much time do we give to the study of the machinery and methods of government and to the principles and policies which come before the people for approval or rejection?

How courageous are we in the use of the ballot and in the improvement of conditions under which the people of this generation live?

How much responsibility do we feel for the remedying of the evils that we may help to remedy and for the bringing of the good that we may help to bring?

We have the best country in the world, which means that we have the best people in the world. And yet, how few comparatively contribute, at any sacrifice to themselves, to the great reforms that mark the progress of civilization.

While most citizens vote, the burden of the fight for government reforms is borne by a small percentage of the electors.

Just as the energy which finds its abode in falling water needs a machine through which to act, so the political virtues inherent in the voter need an organization through which to give expression to its strength, and an organization cannot be carried on without money. What percentage of those who vote in any of the larger parties subscribe financially to their party's funds?

One in ten? Hardly.

HOW MANY HELPED?

We have just won the greatest moral victory ever won at the polls—how many have contributed financially to prohibition? Relatively but a small number.

The W. C. T. U. has been in existence more than a half a century, during which time it has patiently and persistently worked for two great reforms—prohibition and woman suffrage. It has been the greatest educational influence back of these two Constitutional amendments, and yet of the many millions of women who reap the fruits of prohibition and suffrage not more than half a million—not one in ten—have become members of this organization or contribute regularly to its work.

The obligations above mentioned are only a few of the many that all willingly acknowledge when attention is called to the subject; each reader can make up a list for himself and place the emphasis where he desires.

The supreme value of this lesson is that it comes to us from the highest authority and should, therefore, arouse us to new resolves that we may avoid the condemnation visited upon the ungrateful lepers and bring to ourselves the joy that gladdened the heart of the one leper who glorified God and, falling upon his face, poured out his heart in thankfulness to the Master.

CHRIST'S TWO PARABLES ON PRAYER

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR FEBRUARY 11 (Luke 18:1-14)

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint: Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man:

Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus within himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not

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