

# SUNDAY SCHOOLS LESSON

LESSON V.—JANUARY 29.

**GOLDEN TEXT.**—For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—John 3:16.

I. The Kingdom of Heaven—What Christ came to do, as he himself proclaimed (Matt. 4:17), was to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth, to transform the peoples of the earth into members of that kingdom, and thus to change this world into the new heavens and the new earth, the city of God, described in the last two chapters of Revelation.

The first thing to do in taking up this lesson is to obtain a clear view of what the kingdom of heaven is. It is not any outward organization, however many organizations may be included in it, but it is that condition of things where, in the individual and in the world, the principles prevail which make heaven to be heaven, the laws obeyed are the laws of heaven; and the supreme ruler is the God of heaven as represented by Jesus Christ the messenger from heaven.

The kingdom of heaven, like heaven itself, is not any walled place, where all kinds of people may live, without regard to their character, if only they can get within the doors; nor any organization which can be entered through outward rites, without a regard to character.

II. The Inquirer Concerning the Kingdom of Heaven.—Vs. 1, 2. After the wedding at Cana Jesus went to Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, with the members of his mother's family. He did not remain long, but went up to Jerusalem to the Feast of the Passover early in April. Here his reforms made a great commotion in the city, and proclaimed his mission to rulers and to people. As the transformation of water into wine made known one aspect of his messianic work, so now he reveals the same mission under another aspect, by cleansing the temple from the money-changers, and the cattle, and merchandise, by which, instead of a house of prayer for all nations, it had become a den of thieves (John 2:12-22). He revealed his mission still more by working miracles of mercy in Jerusalem (John 2:23). Two effects followed. On the one hand, many believed on him when they saw his miracles, "signs" of the Messiah's work, among the greatest of which signs was his smiting of great evils which they had sighed over in vain. On the other hand, many were angry, and aroused indignant opposition. But both of these effects called wide attention to Jesus and his gospel.

1. Among those who were thus awakened to a knowledge of Jesus "was a man of the Pharisees," among whose numbers were the most of the prominent persons who were waiting for the coming of the Messiah, "named Nicodemus." A Greek name in common use. "A ruler of the Jews." A member of the Sanhedrim (John 7:50).

2. "Came to Jesus by night." In secret, so as not to be observed. He would wish not to be interfered with by curious observers, but would have a heart-to-heart talk with Jesus.

"Thou art a teacher come from God." So far he accepted him as one with a divine message which would shed light on his path, and answer the puzzling questions which thronged about him. "For no man can do these miracles," etc. This was proof positive that Jesus came from God. The argument was good and holds to-day.

III. The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of Heaven.—Vs. 3-8. 3. "Jesus answered." Not so much his words as his needs, and told him the great truth he most needed to know. "Except a man (any one) be born again."

What it is to Be Born Again. As the child has a certain life before it is born, and is then brought into this natural world to develop in accordance with its laws, with its aims, purposes, and results, so that it belongs to the kingdom of human nature; and all this through life imparted in some way by God. So one who is born again enters the spiritual realm, is alive to God and righteousness and love; his chief controlling motives are love to God and love to man; his deepest choice is to serve and obey God; it is the beginning of a character which will grow into the heavenly life, the perfection of the human being. This life is imparted by the spirit of God.

3. Explanations. 4. "How can a man be born when he is old?" He asks for more light.

5. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit." The Lord here declares that there are two elements or factors in the new birth; putting away the old life, and receiving the new. Water was the natural and familiar symbol of cleansing from sin, of putting away the sinful past, of confession of sin. This act the Pharisees were not inclined to believe as applied to themselves. They refused to be baptized by John, and thus confess their need of forgiveness. Therefore to this Pharisee our Lord declares that an honest dying to the past is as needful as new life for the future. \* \* \* It is essential that our past be recognized as needing cleansing and forgiveness.—Exp. Greek Test.

6. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," etc. "By the word flesh he signifies the appetites, desires, faculties, which animate and govern the body, as well as the body itself—the whole equipment with which nature furnishes a man for life in this world."

—Dods. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." To belong to the spiritual kingdom it is as essential to be born of the Spirit, as to be born of the flesh is essential to entering upon life in this world. This is the scientific law of biology.—Ethics Maj. 1:10.

7. "Marvel not," because of the reason given in v. 8. Natural life is as full of mysteries as spiritual life.

"So is every one that is born of the Spirit." The Spirit's methods we cannot know, but the facts of the new life are as plain and certain as that the strong wind bends the forest trees. We may not know the day nor the hour when we are born again, but we may know the fact by the fruits.

Remarks. The new birth comes not from ourselves, but from God. The necessity for it is a statement of fact or truth, not a command. But it is stated so clearly, in order to urge us to the duty of turning to God, of accepting Jesus as our Saviour, of choosing to love and obey God as our first duty and great privilege. It presents a series of the strongest motives, of hope, fear, love, duty, that can move us to become disciples of Christ.

The New Birth is but the Beginning of the New Life. The birth of a child is but the beginning of its life. It is to grow, develop, unfold its powers, be disciplined and trained almost without limit or end. The sprouting of a seed is but the beginning of the plant's life, only you cannot develop the plant unless it is alive.

IV. The Authority of the Teacher Behind this Teaching.—Vs. 9-13. 10. "Art thou a master (that is, teacher) \* \* \* and knowest not these things?" Have you studied the Scriptures enough to teach, and not no-

ticed this great truth? If a "teacher" does not understand these things, what can I expect from the people?

11. "We speak." Why plural? Probably the plural of his conscious alliance with God. The Father who sends the message, and I who bring it speak this truth.

12. "If I (now he speaks for himself) have told you earthly things." Things written and experienced in the earthly existence, which any one can put to the test, and verify. "How shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" Those truths which could not be learned without a revelation from heaven; divine forgiveness, the perfect, free, universal love of God, the divine nature of Christ, the atonement, the reality of life beyond the grave, the way to obtain it, the blessedness of heaven, the glories of the Messiah's kingdom on earth.

13. "No man hath ascended up to heaven," and brought back the testimony of an eye-witness, "but he that came down from heaven." The "Word" of John 1:1-3, 14, who "was with God, and was God," and, therefore, knew absolutely the things which he revealed to men about spiritual and heavenly things. "Even the Son of man." The true representative of humanity; not only God, but a real man, with all the feelings, hopes, temptations, possibilities of man; the ideal man, showing what man may become. "Which is in heaven." His home is in heaven, and he maintains continually a vital connection with heaven. So far as heaven is a state and a character, Jesus was always in heaven. The whole universe is heaven to him, for his senses are all open to perceive and receive.

V. How the New Life Can Be Obtained.—Vs. 14, 15. 14. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness." Jesus now uses an illustration which makes clear some of the heavenly things he came to reveal. Study the story in Num. 21:4-9. "Even so must the Son of man be lifted up." By his whole life and teaching and character, standing then, as now, far above men, but especially by the cross and its redeeming love, containing all motives and powers that attract men to him. To-day the crucified Jesus is the best known, the most exalted person in all history, in all the world, past or present.

15. "That whosoever believeth in him." Accepts him as Teacher, as Saviour, and Lord. Whosoever is better for each one than if he were called by name; for the same name might belong to another. But whosoever includes everybody, the meanest and wickedest, as well as the greatest and best. "Should not perish." From the effects of sin, which naturally end in destruction of the soul. "But have eternal life." Eternal life is the life which nothing can destroy, which endures beyond the grave, and grows fuller and richer as the ages roll on. It is a present possession of the Christian, and does not begin with the world to come, though it continues in it. It is more than mere endless existence. It is goodness, fulness of life, joy, peace, love. It is the kind of life lived in heaven, the kind of life God lives.

### The Heart of the Lesson.

The one great essential, both for the individual and the state, is a new life in the soul that supremely loves the good and hates the evil. This is the one way to the best life here and hereafter.

Then follows the central verse of the Bible.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Luther calls this verse, "The Little Gospel," or "The Little Bible." For the whole gospel, yea, the whole Bible, is condensed in these few words.

On the tiny retina of the eye is pictured a wide extended landscape in its minutest details—mountains, rivers, forests, fields, cities, villages.

This verse is said to be "the best thing ever put in human speech." "Infinite riches in a little room." The treasure room of the London Tower. The Salon Carre of the Louvre.

## A GREAT SUFFERER

LAY HELPLESS AND SPEECHLESS FOR HOURS AT A TIME.

Stinking Spells, Headaches, Rheumatism, All Caused by Poor Blood—Cured by Dr. Williams' Pink Pills.

When Mrs. Williams was asked for some details of the fearful illness from which she had so long suffered, she spoke as follows:

"Ever since I had nervous prostration, about thirteen years ago, I have had periodical spells of complete exhaustion. Any excitement or unusual activity would throw me into a state of lifelessness. At the beginning my strength would come back in a moderate time, but the period of weakness kept lengthening until at last I would lie helpless as many as three hours at a stretch."

"You were under medical treatment, of course?"

"Yes, when I became so bad that I had to give up my housework, in May of 1903, I was being treated for kidney trouble, and later the doctor thought my difficulties came from change of life. I was not only weak, but I had dizzy feelings, palpitation of the heart, misery after eating, hot flashes, nervous headaches, rheumatic pains in the back and hips. The doctor did me so little good that I gave up his treatment, and really feared that my case was incurable."

"What saved you from your state of hopelessness?"

"In July of 1903 I had a very bad spell, and my husband came in one day with a little book which told of remarkable cures effected by a remedy for the blood and the nerves, Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. He bought a box for me, and that was the beginning of my return to health. My appetite grew keen, my food no longer distressed me, my nerves were quieted, and my strength began to revive."

"How long did you take this remedy?"

"For two months only. At the end of that time I had regained my health and cheerfulness, and my friends say that I am looking better than I have done for the past fifteen years."

Mrs. Lizzie Williams is now living at No. 416 Cedar street, Quincy, Illinois. The pills which she praises so highly, cure all diseases that come from impoverished blood. If your system is all run down, Dr. Williams' Pink Pills are the very best remedy to take. Any druggist can supply them.

Happy is the man who is admired and praised by his fellows—for he is dead.

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Itching and Painful Sores Covered Head and Body—Cured in Week By Cuticura.

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The great thing which counts in this world is not talent, but faithfulness.—John Clifford.

Many Children Are Sickly. Mother Gray's Sweet Powders for Children, used by Mother Gray, a nurse in Children's Home, New York, cure Feverishness, Headache, Stomach Troubles, Teething Disorders, Break up Colds and Destroy Worms. At all Druggists, 25c. Sample mailed FREE. Address Allen S. Olmsted, Le Roy, N. Y.

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