

JESUS AND THE CHILDREN

– JANUARY 4. – MARK 9:30-41; 10:13-16. –

"Gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

– 1 Peter 5:5. R.V.

THE Master knew that the time of His death drew near. He wished to break the information gently to His loving disciples. Therefore He passed hastily through Galilee, en route for Capernaum, as stated in our lesson, rather seeking to avoid the curious. He desired this opportunity for breaking to His disciples the news of His soon-to-be-completed sacrifice. While He had previously declared that none could touch him because His hour had not yet come, now He declared that He would be delivered up into the hands of men, and that they would kill Him, and on the third day He would rise from the dead.

But the disciples understood not and feared to ask explanation. They were only natural men; for none were begotten of the Holy Spirit until Pentecost. (John 7:39; Acts 1:8.) As Jews, they had the thought of the Messianic Kingdom uppermost in their minds. Jesus had authorized them to preach the Kingdom at hand, and had promised them a share in the Kingdom. Until now they were not ready for the further information that the Jewish nation would fail to accept Him, and that thus the Kingdom blessings would be put off for centuries.

The Apostles had heard Jesus utter so many "dark sayings" and parables that they were bewildered, and wondered what interpretation to give to these words about His death and resurrection. But their minds naturally drifted to the great hopes that were before them – that Jesus would soon be the King, and they would then be in honored positions as His associates in the

Kingdom. They even went beyond this, and disputed amongst themselves as respects the honorable positions they would occupy and as to which would be greatest – the Lord's prime minister. So little did they understand the great trials and disappointments which were only a few days in advance!

Jesus gathered them about Him and inquired respecting their dispute; but they were ashamed to tell the topic. Then He gave them advice to the effect that the selfishly ambitious who would be seeking honor rather than service would be disappointed. In His Kingdom self-seekers would have the lowest place. As illustrating the matter He took a child and set him in their midst and said, "Whosoever shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me, and whosoever receiveth Me receiveth [not Me alone, but] Him that sent Me."

By this the Master sought to show His disciples that it was not their own greatness that was to be considered, but God's favor. The humblest one amongst them, if favored by God, would have a high position. They were to have the spirit of sympathy and of appreciation of the Divine work of grace in each other. They were to receive each other as representatives of Jesus; and more, as representatives of the Father. If they entertained such views of one another, surely they would be kind and gentle toward all, and would seek to be helpful – "in honor preferring one another." – Romans 12:10. [R5362 : page 363]

BLESSING THE CHILDREN

The second part of our lesson recounts that the great Teacher was a lover of children even though, so far as the record shows, He did not generally give His time to them. When fond parents brought their children, desiring Him to bless them, the disciples, feeling that the Lord's time was too valuable to be thus used, rebuked them. But Jesus very earnestly directed that the children should be allowed to come. He took them up in His arms and put His hands upon them

and blessed them, thus exhibiting His own sympathetic love and humility of heart. He could preach to one Samaritan woman by the well or take time to fondle children, notwithstanding the weight of the work that was upon Him and the fact that His course was nearly finished.

But as the subject of the Kingdom was uppermost in His teachings and in the minds of His disciples, He took another opportunity of teaching them a lesson. They had, perhaps, been feeling too sure that they would be members of the Kingdom class. They had not yet learned what crucial tests would be applied to those who would be counted worthy to sit with the Redeemer in His Messianic Throne of glory and to participate with Him in blessing all the families of the earth. He therefore said: "Permit the little children to come unto Me, for of such is the Kingdom of God."

We are not by these words to understand that the Master meant that His disciples, those whom He usually addressed in His discourses, would not be in the Kingdom, and that all in the Kingdom would be little children. Quite to the contrary. Little children will not be in the Kingdom at all. Only developed, tried, perfected characters will constitute the overcomers who will sit with the Master in His Throne.

The thought that the Lord would impress here, as elsewhere expressed, is that even His twelve Apostles would not be in the Kingdom unless they became childlike, teachable, plastic, trustful. The proper child, unspoiled by its elders, is disposed to be very trustful; and, until deceived, it is disposed to believe every word of the parent and to trust implicitly to the parent's wisdom and power. All who become children of God must reach this condition of heart as respects the Heavenly Father. Whoever does not attain this condition will not be fit for the Kingdom.

Impressing His subject still further, the Great Teacher said: "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child,

shall not enter therein." This expression clarified the subject. The followers of Jesus are not to be little children, but must be childlike, because only the childlike followers will ever participate in the Kingdom. The receiving of the Kingdom mentioned evidently means the receiving of the Message of the Kingdom; for manifestly none can receive a kingdom until the kingdom has come or has been offered.

Thus with the Jewish nation: The offer of the Kingdom came at the close of Jesus' ministry, when, after the manner of the kings of Israel, He rode into Jerusalem upon the ass, thus offering Himself as their King. The worldly scribes and Pharisees were too wise to receive Jesus, and plotted for His death. His disciples were as trustful as little children, and fully believed the Message of God's Word that there would be a Kingdom and the further Message that Jesus was the appointed King, who in due time would take His power and reign for the blessing of the world.

This was illustrated when Jesus sat upon the ass. The multitude, crying "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" treated Him as the King. The disciples, fully acquiescing, as little children, doubted nothing. On the other hand, the "wise" scribes and Pharisees called out that the **[R5362 : page 364]** multitude must be stopped from thus shouting. They should be told that Jesus was not the Messiah, that they were deceived. But Jesus merely answered that what they witnessed had been foretold by the Prophet Zechariah (9:9) – that there must be a shout. And the Lord declared that if the people did not shout the stones would be obliged to cry out, in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled. – Luke 19:40.

It seems remarkable that, after all the Bible has said respecting Messiah's Kingdom and the work which it is to accomplish in the blessing of Israel and all the families of the earth, so few seem to believe the Message, so few seem to be willing to receive it as little

children. The majority today, like the scribes and Pharisees of old, are too "wise" to believe in the possibility of the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom. They realize the need of the Kingdom, but they have certain theories of their own which blind them to the Truth.

Some mistakenly hold that the Kingdom of Christ was set up at Pentecost and that He has been reigning ever since, conquering the world. Alas, how unreasonable this seems, when we know that even under the most favorable conditions the heathen of the world double every century! How strange that some Christians have prayed so long that God's Kingdom would come and rule the world and put down the wicked and exalt the obedient, until finally the Divine will would be done on earth as completely as it is now done in Heaven – and yet all this without really, properly believing that the Kingdom which was offered to Israel, and which they refused, is evidently to be established – at the Second Coming of Jesus and the resurrection change of His Church!

Another large body of Christian brethren, Roman Catholics, hold still a different theory; namely, that Messiah's Thousand-Year-Reign began in the days of Pope Leo III, A.D. 800; and that He has reigned in the world ever since. This view holds that it was most necessary for Jesus to come a second time to establish His Kingdom; but that in the year 800 A. D., Jesus established His followers in kingly power, and made the Pope at Rome His representative and vice-gerent. The word vice-gerent, as we all know, signifies one who reigns instead of another. The claim is that Christ has been reigning for now eleven hundred and thirteen years, fully and officially represented by the Pope.

Neither of these views is satisfactory, and neither is Scriptural. Surely the conquest of the world has not been going on for the last eleven hundred years, as we might have hoped, if God's time had come for Messiah to take the long-promised Kingdom. Surely what St. Paul said of his day is true now also: "The god of this world hath

blinded the minds of them that believe not" – "the children of disobedience" – to hinder the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ!

The glorious Gospel of Christ is, "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself." His glorious Message further is that His Church shall sit with Him in His Throne, a Royal Priesthood; and that in His Day the righteous shall flourish and all the evil-doers shall be cut off in the Second Death. Well did the Apostle warn us not to depart from "the faith once delivered to the saints." Well were we told that many would depart from that faith, giving heed to spirits that would lead them astray and to doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1), quite unlike the glorious, loving Gospel of God's Love, and His Mercy that endureth forever!

Our Golden Text assures us that the Church, now being called to sit with Christ in His Throne in due time, must be girded with humility, as servants one of another; for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Therefore only the humble will receive the great gift of the Kingdom honors and opportunities.

=====