

::R3518 : page 73::

"ONCE I WAS BLIND, NOW I SEE"

JOHN 9:1-11.—MARCH 19.

Golden Text:—"I am the Light of the world."

OUR LORD'S miracles and parables touch almost every side of every question when rightly understood. True, our Lord's own explanations of his parables and dark sayings are not elaborate, not deep. He left the elaboration for his disciples under the guidance of the holy Spirit. The reason for this is given in his own words, "I have many things to tell you, but ye cannot bear them now." The reason for their being better able to bear them, understand them and appreciate them later on was because then the work of our Lord's sacrifice having been finished at Calvary, and he having ascended on high, presented the merit of his sacrifice as the atonement price for the sins of his Church, and thus made it possible for them to receive the holy Spirit not previously given unto them—not enjoyed even by the disciples as a begetting Spirit before Pentecost.

One of these partially expounded lessons of our Lord's ministry is found in the lesson before us. A man born blind, a wayside beggar, had drawn the attention of the Lord and the apostles, and his healing and the preparation therefor serve as an opportunity for a far-reaching lesson, only a part of which, however, the

::R3519 : page 74::

apostles could learn at this time. They had the thought that all the sickness and pain and sorrow in the world was the result of sin. They had this thought properly, because the Scriptures had so indicated, assuring them that if they walked in the Lord's ways they would have blessings of health and prosperity in all of life's affairs for themselves, their families, their flocks and their herds. Properly enough, then, they understood that the various evils witnessed on every hand were in some degree the result of sin, either of the individual or of his ancestors, inherited.

NEITHER THIS MAN NOR HIS PARENTS

The man blind from his birth started a query in their minds as to the sin which led to the blindness, and being "unlearned and ignorant men" it need not surprise us that they were not very logical in

their thoughts nor in the question they asked, "Whether did this man sin or his parents, that he was born blind?" Of course the man himself could not have sinned before he was born; of course, therefore, whatever responsibility there was came to him through inheritance, as the Lord had declared that "I will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those that hate me," those who wilfully violate his laws. True, there was at this time a heathen idea respecting the transmigration of souls, which taught that all humanity had at some previous time lived in some other condition either better or worse than the present one. But it would be extremely unlikely that the apostles, "unlearned," should have any particular knowledge of these theories of the heathen, which were known chiefly to the educated; and as for the Hebrew Scriptures, not a word in them favored such a thought, but the very contrary.

This same heathenish thought still prevails in the far East, India, etc., and has been slightly introduced again in civilized countries under the name of Theosophy. It is one of the main delusions ensnaring the people known as Mormons. The Scriptural teaching is that God created man in Eden, and that all the families of the earth are the posterity of this first man, Adam; and because of this relationship to Adam as their father, and their consequent relationship to his sin and its penalty, death, therefore all in Adam die—his entire race is a dying race. The belief in the ransom settles this doctrine most thoroughly, showing that our Lord's life redeemed the life of father Adam, and thus incidentally redeemed all who lost life through him. "As by man came death, by man also came the resurrection from the dead; as all in Adam die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." "Of one blood God hath made all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."—Acts 17:26.

Our Lord's reply, that neither the blind man nor his parents had sinned, is not to be understood as implying that these people were absolutely perfect, sinless, spotless—not to be understood as contradicting the Scriptures which declare, "There is none righteous, no not one; all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The words simply signified that the blindness of this man was not a penalty for his personal sin or for some special sin of his parents. This need not imply either that God had specially intervened to cause blindness in this case—rather we may suppose that the blindness came through the general weakness of heredity, or by what might be termed the accidents incidental to our present imperfect condition as a race of sinners. A similar expression on our Lord's part was made in respect to those men upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, killing them. Our Lord said, "Suppose ye that these men were sinners above others? I tell you, nay; unless ye shall repent ye shall all likewise perish."

The thought is that the whole world is under condemnation to death. We are a race of convicts, and death conditions are properly, justly permitted to prevail, not interfered with, because the lives of all humanity are forfeited through original sin and disobedience, and through our

inheritance of the weaknesses and imperfections and unfitness resulting. All are thus perishing, and had it not been for divine mercy, in providing the Redeemer and the great sacrifice for sins, there would be no hope for any as respects the future life; death to all would signify that they had perished. And even though all the way has been opened for the dying race, nevertheless repentance for sin, acceptance of Christ as the Savior, and obedience to his voice, are necessary to our escape from the sentence of sin—death.

Many will agree with us thus far who would fail to go further along what we believe to be logical, scriptural grounds, namely, that in God's providence not only has his love provided the redemption and the opportunity for blessing to the world, but that the same love and wisdom will ultimately provide that all shall see the great light and hear the voice of him that speaketh from heaven, and thus either accept or reject the favor divine, the life everlasting, on terms of full obedience. We hold that it is in full accord with the entire testimony of Scripture that few now have the ability to see or to hear; that the majority are both blind and deaf to this message in the present time, some completely blind and completely deaf, others partially blind and partially deaf. The glorious assurance of the Lord's Word is that in God's due time all the blind eyes shall be opened and all the deaf ears unstopped.

THE MORN COMETH AND A NIGHT ALSO

This was the very lesson which the Lord taught from this incident—taught to the extent that his hearers were able to appreciate it. He declared, "While I am in the world I am the Light of the world; I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work." Then he proceeded to the opening of the blind man's eyes, that the latter might see him as the Light of the world. True, the opening of blind natural eyes could not give sight to the eyes of his understanding, the eyes of the heart; but it could and did figure or illustrate this which was the real essence of our Lord's teachings, of which this miracle was a part. Without in the slightest degree disparaging our Lord's many miracles upon the blind, lame, deaf, etc., we can readily see that these were incidental, and only in a secondary sense his mission.

We can see, too, that while multitudes were healed, still greater multitudes remained unhealed; and that if it had been our Lord's special mission to heal all the lepers and all the blind and all the deaf, and to have awakened all the dead of Palestine, then he failed most signally in accomplishing the work. But that was not the work which he came to do. He came to be the Light of the world in a much larger sense than this. He came

::R3519 : page 75::

to do the work of him that sent him; and to finish that work and the special feature of it that was

then due was the sacrificing of himself, the laying down of his life in the service of his brethren, in the declaration of the good tidings, in the teaching of the people through parables, dark sayings and miracles, which subsequently under the holy Spirit's illumination would guide a certain class to the real seeing, the real understanding and the real fellowship of heart with him and his work and with the Father, that was intended.

It will be at his second advent that our Lord will be "the Light of the world" in the full, glorious sense which the Scriptures everywhere set forth:—"The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams." With the ushering in of that glorious sunlight begins the new day for which we hope and pray,—the "day of Christ." We now reckon the day as beginning at midnight, but God supervised the Jewish reckoning on this subject and under that supervision the day begins in the evening, progressed to midnight and then to the dawning, and by and by to the full light of day. In harmony with this God-given picture of the day we may see that our Lord's ministry was in the eventide which followed the Jewish day, the day of Moses. A little of its light still remained, and in that light the Lord personally, and subsequently through his disciples, established the Gospel Church. He well knew of the dark night that would follow his ministry, in which darkness would cover the earth and gross darkness the heathen.

The Lord's words then signified that he realized the opportunity at hand and did with his might what his hands found to do, what was possible to be done under all the circumstances and conditions prevailing, and with a realization that the night was drawing rapidly upon the Jewish people, and that not only his own work would be cut short soon by his death, but that all opportunities for dealing with the Jews would soon be at an end. The apostles after Pentecost entered fully into the Master's spirit in respect to this shortness of the time, and labored incessantly first with the Jews and only subsequently with the Gentiles, until all the elect had been gathered from the once favored nation, even though these were but a remnant, as the apostle explains. The rest were blinded, went into complete darkness, while the light of divine favor through the Lamp, the Word, was sent amongst the Gentiles to gather out of them also an elect class for membership in the spiritual Israel, for membership in the body of Christ, to be light-bearers under present conditions, through trials and difficulties and oppositions, and, by and by, to be associates with the Lord as members of the glorious Sun of Righteousness, the great Light which in the duly appointed time shall enlighten the whole world.

As we near the morning watches we have the evidence of day drawing on; and as we listen to the voice of the Prophet, we hear him declare in answer to our query, "Watchman, what of the night?" the message, "The morning cometh, but a night also," and then assures us that although we are now in the very dawn of the morning a fierce storm is to break and cause another "night" of darkness and of trouble upon the world and upon Christendom, to sift, to separate, to purify the

elect. Our hearts, however, are encouraged with the assurance that with the breaking of that storm will

::R3520 : page 75::

come the full splendor of the Millennial morning, and with it the Sun of Righteousness blessing and illuminating the world. Moreover, in that time the assurance is that all the blind eyes shall be opened so that the whole world will be able to discern that "The Light of the world is Jesus."

"ANOINT THINE EYES WITH EYE-SALVE"—REV. 3:18.

The making of an eye-salve of the dust of a Palestine road, mixed with the saliva of our Lord's mouth, seems rather peculiar at first. We would naturally be inclined to say, "How strange! Do not put that stuff upon the man's eyes, for that will only make them worse. That dust is full of all manner of impurities; that very dust has helped to blind thousands and thousands of the people of this country." A traveller in that vicinity says,

"Blindness is common in Palestine to a degree which we in western lands can scarcely realize. There is probably no country in the world, except Egypt, where this affliction is so prevalent. At Gaza, for instance, it is said that one-third of the population has lost one or both eyes, and from my own observation of that city I should not hesitate to say that the statement is not exaggerated."



Blind Men of Palestine.

Why, then, did our Lord use a clay or ointment made out of that dust, apparently so unsuitable, and then send the blind man to the Pool of Siloam to wash and receive his sight? We answer that

probably a deep spiritual lesson is contained in it, a lesson for all the apostles and for the followers of Jesus from then until now. As the blindness of the man was figurative of the general blindness upon the people, blindness to the Truth, blindness to the light of the world, so this method of healing the blindness will illustrate the method the Lord has been using throughout this Gospel age. The secretions of our Lord's mouth might well represent his grace and truth, while the earth used may well represent the poor earthly talents of us and his disciples. Who are we, that we should be made the instruments of God in opening the eyes of the blind—we who are imperfect ourselves, blemished, fallen? But the spirit of the Lord's lips coming upon us so transforms our energies and talents as to make them useful in his service. By the grace of God, as his mouthpieces, representatives, his followers have opened the blind eyes, not of all people, but of many, nevertheless.

What a blessing we realized when such human clay was used of the Lord for the anointing of our eyes, and what a privilege was granted in that we have been made the clay ointment the Master has used in the blessing of others. But the anointing was not sufficient, it needed more; it needed the washing at the fountain. And so after the Lord has used us, his servants, as the clay in his hands for the anointing of blinded eyes, it is necessary that we should direct them to the fountain of his truth and grace, where they may wash, where they may realize that the cleansing is of the Lord's provision entirely, and that however good the clay and however

::R3520 : page 76::

thorough the anointing, no blessing could come except as they obediently and in faith accepted the grace and truth as the refreshing stream of divine favor to their enlightenment.

The miracle of the opening of the eyes of one born blind was so notable that it attracted the attention of all in the neighborhood. None had ever before heard of any physician able to restore sight to one who was born blind. The matter was brought to the attention of the Pharisees and Doctors of the Law as a wonderful instance of divine power, or to see if they could offer any other solution for the matter. Evidently this was a part of our Lord's design and a part of what he meant when he declared that the man was not born blind as a punishment for sin but for the glory of God. God allowed nature to take its course in this manner and to produce an exception or freak of nature, and now the one who had been thus afflicted in the past was made the recipient of a special blessing which fully compensated him. Let us learn to view all of life's affairs from this standpoint. Whatever we may have that by nature would seem to be disadvantageous or a hindrance to us, the Lord is able to so overrule as to make of it a blessing, a proportionately greater blessing.

The Pharisees, full of envy against Jesus, perceived that his influence was gaining daily with the

people, and this made them the more bitter against him. In their wrong condition of heart they had already prejudged his heart and his motive, not by the fruits of his life, but by their envious sentiments. Of course, under the circumstances, the judgment would be warped and twisted, leading to wrong conclusions. They catechised the parents, who feared to give any expression on the subject, because they had heard that the rulers of the synagogue had determined that if any one should confess Jesus he should be excommunicated, should not be permitted to attend the synagogue or fellowship with others or enjoy its religious privileges, should be counted unworthy the name and privileges of a Jew, should be treated as an outcast from God and his people. They, therefore, answered that their son was of age and that he could speak for himself.

The son was questioned over and over with an evident desire to find some fault with the procedure, to show that it was not a genuine miracle, etc. The man formerly blind became justly indignant at the special attempt to traduce the one who had so befriended him, and in answer to the Pharisees' statement that he should give glory only to God, because the one who had performed the miracle was a sinner, he demurred. As they repeated their questions he became more indignant at their evil spirit and said, Why do you ask so many questions? Are you anxious to become his disciples? He touched a sore spot and aroused their wrath, and they declared that he was a disciple of Jesus, and cast him out of the synagogue and ostracised him. It was after this that Jesus found him. We read, "Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and when he found him he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? and he answered, I believe, and worshipped."

HOW HINDRANCES MAY ASSIST US

In this we have a fresh illustration of how hindrances and difficulties and obstacles may become the greatest helps and aids under God's providences to those who are of the right condition of heart. This poor blind man, an ignorant beggar, seemingly most unfortunate of men, seemingly least cared for by the Lord, was evidently at heart honest and sincere. This was demonstrated by his after conduct, because character, principle, cannot be put on in a moment, but is a matter of development. It was, doubtless, because the Lord saw in his heart this sincerity that he specially favored him with the blessing of the opening of the eyes, and that it was because he was honest enough and fearless enough to confess the Lord in a proper manner that he was still further favored, and that the Lord sought him out and granted him the opening of the eyes of his understanding in addition to the opening of his natural eyes. If we could but receive this lesson fully and completely into our hearts, what a great blessing it would bring us as impressing upon us the necessity for honesty of heart, and as proofs to us of the willingness of the Lord to make all things work together for good to them who love him—even to them who are of the right attitude of heart, which would love the Lord if it knew him. To such he is willing to grant his favors and the opening of the eyes of their understanding—not suddenly, but step by step. As we follow the

Lord's directions we get one blessing after another.

Let us draw further a lesson as between the experiences of this blind man and the spiritual lesson already suggested. Some of us were born blind or nearly blind as respects the ability to see our heavenly Father's glorious face and the reflection of the same in our Lord Jesus. We were born blind through no folly of our own and through no folly of our parents, perhaps. Darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people—the darkness of idolatry and heathendom upon the majority of the world, and the darkness of the Dark Ages upon the so-called Christian world. We saw not the Lord, and our fancies, inspired by the great Adversary, were gross misunderstandings of the wisdom, justice, love and power of our Creator.

The Scriptures tell us that the darkness or blindness came from the Adversary, the god of this world, who blinds the minds of them who believe not, lest the glorious light of God's goodness should shine in their hearts from the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. In the Lord's own time and way he sent us a blessing through the poor dust of the earth, blended and tempered with the secretions of his mouth, and sent the message, too, that we should wash at the fountain. Thus washing we realized the forgiveness of sins and saw in a new light the love and mercy of our Father in heaven. Then came testings, not to destroy us but to prove us and to develop us if we were sincere at heart.

The agencies used by our Lord for our blessing were produced perhaps by our friends. The threat of ostracism was before our mind as we confessed the blessing we had received and the source from which it came. All possessed with the right spirit in the matter surely followed the course of this blind man of our lesson, and courageously confessed the blessings received and the quarter from which they came. Now as then such a confession brings repudiation, contempt, sarcasm and casting out, but now as well as then obedience and the acceptance of such experiences mean an additional manifestation to us of divine favor.

It was after we had endured something for the Lord's sake and for the Truth's sake, and rejoicing in

::R3521 : page 77::

our opened eyes, that the Lord found us in a particular sense and revealed himself to us in a still higher and more favorable blessing, and thus we became his disciples in the highest sense—his followers. Let us continue to follow him; let us continue to take whatever experiences come to us in the path of duty, and realize that it is a privilege to be on the side of the right and the Truth. Those who are faithful now in the present time of trials and testings will, as the Lord's disciples, be privileged in turn to be used of him in anointing the eyes of others, and thus all the members of

the body under the guidance of the Lord, the Head, will during this present time work the works of him that sent us, and let the light shine out, realizing that the opportunities for service will soon now be closed—the night is coming when no man can work.

The great time of trouble just preceding the shining forth of the Sun of Righteousness is near. The little time between now and then is for the very purpose of selecting out the Lord's true people and applying to them the eye-salve of Truth and informing them where they must wash, and in general in bringing to them the blessings of joint-heirship and discipleship until the body of Christ shall be complete. Very shortly, to those thus faithful, will be the privilege also of association with our Lord and Head as the Light of the world in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

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— March 1, 1905 —



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