

BIBLE STUDY

Sunday School Lesson

The Child in a Christian World

Topic for December 22, 1929

Luke 2: 8-20

Golden Text.—Suffer the little children and forbid them not to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 19:14.

Devotional Reading.—Isaiah 11:1-9.

Home Readings.—*Mon.*, Luke 2:8-20, The Birth of Jesus; *Tues.*, Matt. 18:1-10, The Child in the Kingdom; *Wed.*, I Samuel 3:10-19, The Child in the Church; *Thurs.*, Acts 7:20-34, Formative Influences in Childhood; *Fri.*, Genesis 22:1-13, Father and Son; *Sat.*, Acts 22:1-10, The Religious Education of a Child; *Sun.*, Isaiah 11:1-9, The World Made Safe for Childhood.

Introduction

Instead of devoting the whole lesson period to the story of the birth of Jesus, as has been the custom, the Lesson Committee (probably in view of the fact that we shall begin a series of lessons on Christ next month) recommends that the story should be used this Christmas mainly as a starting point for a lesson on the child in a Christian world.

Christmas, with its story of the Christ Child, puts the child, as Dr. Harold Hough has said, "at the center of the picture," and there is no better time for us to think of the place which Christ would have our children occupy in the world and of what we are doing and should do to secure this place for our own children and the children of the community.

Our World Not Christian

Our world is not a Christian world, but it is not going to be Christian until we Christians put it on a Christian basis. And this means that we must begin with our children: without waiting for the world to become Christian we should give them today the place which we know they would occupy in our hearts, our minds, our homes, our community. But we cannot do this unless we get a more exalted view of childhood than the average Christian has today. The average modern Christian is wonderfully fitted to give his child a high place in a pagan world and that is what he is doing. He thinks of his children as his pagan ancestors thought of theirs—as fine little animals with thinking machine attachments designed for a career in this world and possibly some sort of existence in a world to come—something too hazy to be interesting. And he acts accordingly. He is doing more for little John's body and mind than his forefathers ever dreamed of doing for their little Johns. But he is doing nothing for little John *himself*, and he is not going to do anything until his eyes are open and he is able to see little John himself. That is what the average Christian father and mother need today more than anything else in the world: they need to see little John as Jesus sees him—not as a fine little animal with a thinking machine attachment, nor even a fine little animal who has some-

how acquired a soul; but as a spirit—a spirit temporarily provided with a material body for his short stay in a material world, a spirit with an eternal destiny, needing to be fitted, not only for his mission in this material world, but for his mission in the world of spirit in which he is to live forever, beginning here and now.

And there is no better time to get this vision—to see our children as Jesus sees them—than today, when our minds and hearts are turned toward the Christ Child, the thought of whom has done more to develop a reverence for childhood than anything else unless it is the story of Jesus blessing little children.

Here are a few Biblical selections which give us an exalted view of childhood:

From Matt. 18:1-6 we learn the importance the Master attached to a little child and his deep feeling about the responsibility of its elders to surround it with good influences.

In Mark 9:36, 37, 42, we have another instance of Jesus emphasizing the importance of the child and its training.

Mark 10:13-16 gives us an instance of the tenderness and gentleness of Jesus toward children and shows the high estimate he places upon them.

Luke 2:1-20 tells the story of the birth of the Child, the story that awakened in the world a new reverence for childhood, and a new sense of consideration and responsibility for children.

The News That Made People Happy

Instead of studying the story let us spend a moment thinking of the simple fact that it was not the birthday of Jesus that made the shepherds happy, but the news that a Savior was born. That news never fails to make a man happy. If we had heard nothing about Christ and a messenger should come to us with the news that One from heaven was coming to our help—to lift from our hearts the burden of sin that was crushing us, One with power to cleanse us from all sin and to make us over again and prepare us to dwell in the Father's presence—and we should believe him, would we not be happy? It is a mistake to say that everybody in our town has heard the glad news about Christ. Many have heard it and many are happy, but look at these men who still go stumbling about our streets with great burdens on their hearts. Look at these poor women who cry themselves to sleep every night over some nameless sorrow. Do you suppose they really know who came to bear men's burdens and to heal their broken hearts? They have indeed heard that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but do they know anything about Christ the Lord?

No: there are multitudes around us who have heard of Jesus all their lives but who know nothing of Christ the Savior and Lord of men. And what is worse there are multitudes who are not going to learn anything about him if we do not carry the news to them. Nor are they likely to learn anything about him if we do not carry the news to them in a way that will enable them to believe it. We must back up the news with our own lives. Men must be able to see in our lives that Christ the Savior has indeed come into the world.

Shall we not become Christ's news-carriers today? Shall we not begin this Christmas day to make Christ known to the people of our town? And shall we not carry the news to them in our faces and our lives as well as in our words?

The Possibilities in the Christ Child and in Our Own Children

Let us continue to brood over the story for another moment or two, until we can feel the solemnity of it, until we can realize the halo that the picture of the Christ Child casts over childhood and until we can realize the wonderful possibilities hidden in this Babe for the kingdom of God and the world, and we shall then be led to think of the wonderful possibilities that lie hidden in our own little children for the kingdom of God and the world. This will bring us to the very heart of the matter we wish to study.

What Jesus Would Have Us Do for Our Children

What did Mary do for her child? (1) She accepted him before his birth as a responsibility from God. ("Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."—Luke 1:38.) (2) She looked after the needs of his mind, body and spirit, so that he "grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him." (Luke 2:40.) (3) She required of him filial obedience, "He was subject unto them." (Luke 2:51.) She was undoubtedly a pious Jewish mother of the highest type and like all pious Jewish mothers of her time she did everything in her power to bring up her child in the knowledge of God, and to give him a full chance to achieve the high destiny which God had planned for him.

Unquestionably Jesus would have us bring up our children in the same way—not by his mother's methods, but in her spirit and to the same high end.

1. Jesus wants us first of all to accept responsibility to God for our children. Have you noticed that when he was here in the flesh there were two kinds of people to whom he never referred except to condemn them? They were the hypocrites and people who refused to recognize their accountability to God.

2. Jesus wants us to give our children a fair chance to come to him—to take the first great step toward achieving their high destiny as sons and daughters of God. (Luke 18:15,16.)

3. Jesus wants us to fulfill all of the high moral obligations of parenthood regardless of what others may be doing for our children.

4. Jesus wants us to provide in our homes the kind of spiritual atmosphere they need for the development of the life of their spirits. In most homes where the children are not developing in spiritual life you will find that the fundamental trouble is in the atmosphere, and that usually this trouble is caused by something in or something lacking in the spirit or mind of one or both parents.—Pell's Notes.

Senior Endeavor Lesson

How Christmas Sets the Whole World Singing

Topic for December 22, 1929

Luke 2: 1-14

Suitable Songs

"For God So Loved the World," "Joy to the World," "In My Heart There Rings a Melody," "Love Divine," "Christ is King," "Sing as You Go," "You May Have the Joy-bells."

The Leader's Talk

We have been singing Christmas songs