

The Sunday School.

The International Lessons for October.

I.

October 5.—Luke xx. 9-19.

The Parable of the Vineyard.

The only verse that needs explaining in this parable is the 18th, "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken (literally *crushed*); but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder (literally *scatter him as chaff*)." The stone is that spoken of in the previous verse (which is a quotation from Ps. cxviii. 22), "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." The stone is spoken of as first "rejected"—that is, cast aside, and lying in the way, so that men stumble over it; then as made "the head of the corner"—that is, lifted up and placed in the most honourable part of the building. Jesus is that stone. While Jesus was upon earth, He was despised and rejected of men. This was their loss, not His. They fell upon Him, they suffered much damage and loss; but now He is exalted, and when He comes again in power and judgment, those who still scorn and hate him, He will "fall upon," and will scatter them as chaff.

The Jews who misunderstood and despised him in the days of His humiliation suffered great loss and damage for it; but we know that some of them repented afterwards. They who did not shall endure the greater, even the eternal, destruction when He comes in the glory of His Father and of the holy angels.

There is no doubt that the parable was spoken for the benefit of the Jews, and especially of their teachers, the Scribes and Pharisees; and the lesson is very plain. They or their fathers had rejected the Prophets who had come in the name of God, and now they were about to cast out and even kill the beloved Son of God Himself. Here, therefore, they are warned solemnly that their privileges will be taken from them, and they themselves shall suffer the just punishment of their abuse of these privileges. But immediately we see that the parable reaches to us also. As the Shulamite said, we each have our vineyard to keep—that is to say, our work to do, and our life to live for God. He will call us to account for the things done in the body. To teach us to live for Him, He has sent us also prophets and apostles and martyrs, preachers and teachers. They come in humble guise, perhaps; but when they are pure and true, the conscience and the Spirit of God tell us they are God's messengers. According to our treatment of them, and of their message, shall be our judgment.

This is the lesson for children. God is very good. He gives His Word, which they are taught to read; He sends teachers and preachers, also parents sometimes who are godly, and earnest anxious friends. If they will not listen, He will take these blessings all away, and finally the Son Himself will come to judgment, and He will be a consuming

fire to all the workers of iniquity. The Jews cried, "God forbid!" when Jesus spoke of their final loss; and so children are often terrified by Jesus' own words about the final judgment. But it is only the *punishment* they dread; they will not let go the sinful habit: and so one day the stone of righteous judgment falls, and they are scattered as the chaff.

II.

October 12.—Luke xxii. 7-20.

The Lord's Supper.

1. "The day of unleavened bread." On the evening of the 13th of the month Nisan (the 14th was the feast-day), every Jewish father repaired to the fountain to draw pure water with which to knead the unleavened bread. When he returned, he lit a torch and searched every corner of the house to see that not a vestige of leaven was left in it. Such a Jewish father, "bearing a pitcher of water," Peter and John were directed to follow.

2. "Furnished." It would contain little, if anything, more than the *triclinium*, or table in the form of a horse-shoe, with its seats.

3. "With desire I have desired." This is a Hebrew way of saying, "I have greatly desired."

4. "Until it (*i.e.* the Passover) be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." He, the true Paschal Lamb, was about to be sacrificed. By that sacrifice the kingdom of God would be established. Therefore this was the last Passover till the Passover should have its fulfilment in the kingdom of God.

5. "The new testament in my blood." There is a dispute as to whether this word ever means *will* or *testament*. It certainly means *covenant* in most places, and this seems to give the better sense here—the new covenant ratified by the shedding of my blood, as the old covenant made with Abraham was similarly established by blood.

There are many great controversies which still rage over these simple, though majestic, verses. The teacher must exercise his own judgment as to touching upon them. But here is a story which may be told with interest and profit. First, recall that terrible night in Egypt when the Angel of Death passed from house to house, and left the first-born dead behind him; but the homes of the Israelites were spared, for a lamb had been slain and its blood sprinkled on the lintel and door-posts. Tell them, next, how a lamb was slain and a Passover kept by every Hebrew family, year after year, throughout all the ages of their history. Tell them that it was a custom, at a certain point in the feast, for one of the children to rise up and ask his father what the Passover meant, who then told the story of that dreadful night in Egypt, and their deliverance. But tell them that the sacrifice of the lamb was not only a memory, but also a promise. It did not look backwards merely, but pointed forwards also; for that lamb was a type and promise of a Redeemer. Tell them that the death of Jesus delivers from

the power of sin and Satan, through the shedding of His blood on Calvary, as the shedding of the lamb's blood saved their fathers from the hand of the Angel of Death, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission." Then make them read over Jesus' words at the Last Supper again, and they will see the meaning, and begin to feel something of the power of them.

III.

October 19.—Luke xxii. 24-37.

The Spirit of True Service.

1. "There was a strife also among them (the disciples), which of them should be accounted the greatest." It took place, apparently, over the choice of places at the table. Some think that Judas claimed precedence, from his official position. He seems to have found a place, at any rate, next to Jesus, on the left, while John sat on His right.

2. "Benefactors." The title, used by kings, is frequently found on coins of that day. It is a fine-sounding title, but the disciples knew that the sound was hollow.

3. "I am among you as he that serveth." Recall here the beautiful incident related by John (xiii.) of the washing of the disciples' feet.

4. "That ye . . . may sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." No one may say yet what that means. But it is sad that the words are sometimes used to claim that very precedence which Christ is rebuking.

5. "Satan hath desired to have you." The verb is in the aorist or simple past. It describes a past event, and it is stronger than merely "desired," rather "demanded." We may think of such a scene as is described in the first chapter of Job.

6. "I have (omit *have*) prayed for thee." Satan demanded to sift all the disciples. Jesus prayed specially for Simon, perhaps because he was in special danger then, and because he was a fit instrument when turned again (and God loves to do His work by instruments) to bring back and strengthen the rest.

The title given to this lesson is, "The Spirit of True Service." Might it not have been more appropriately called "The Spirit of True Government"? The disciples wanted each to be first, wanted each to rule the rest. Jesus taught them how to be rulers indeed. The true ruler is the self-denying servant. To be the first, He said, become the last; for "the last shall be first," and "he that loseth his life shall gain it."

Jesus knows that the time is coming when the disciples will do so; they will each seek to serve the rest. And so He tells them that they shall become rulers in the kingdom of God, and judges of the twelve tribes of Israel. Was it this promise that taught St. Paul the strange truth that "the saints shall judge the world"? (1 Cor. vi. 2).

When the sons of Zebedee made the request that they might sit on either hand of Christ in His kingdom, He told them, in words of yet deeper solemnity, that the path to honour led through the valley of shame. "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink of?" How hard it is to

learn that lesson! Scarcely ever is it learnt but by bitter experience. The children will scarcely understand the meaning of it; but so it is.

"For the clear bells of triumph—a knell,
For the sweet kiss of meeting—farewell;
For the height of the mountain—the steep,
For the waking in heaven—death's sleep."

IV.

October 26.—Luke xxii. 39-53.

Jesus in Gethsemane.

1. "This cup." It is the cup of which He spoke to James and John, the sons of Zebedee. It is the cup of the whole terrible night and morning that lay before Him—the traitor's kiss, the mocking trials, the spitting, the scourging, the cross, but surely above all the moment of the cry, "My God, my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?"

2. "Behold a multitude." The 52nd verse tells us some of those who composed it—"the chief priests and captains of the temple, and the elders." "God forbid!" they cried, these very men, when Jesus spoke of their privileges being taken from them; but yet here they are about to kill the Husbandman's well-beloved Son.

How simple are the words used to describe this unparalleled scene! The youngest child may understand them all. But who is wise enough to understand the scene itself? "Father, if it be possible"—why was it not possible? We can only answer in the Lord's own words: Because this was the hour of the power of darkness.

But let us follow Jesus, and listen and watch with awe and reverence. St. Luke gives us none of the beautiful discourses which He spoke before He left the upper room; nor does he mention the hymn which He sang with the disciples on the eve of His agony. Then He descended the Valley of the Kedron, crossed the brook itself, and entered the garden called Gethsemane, or "the oil-press," as it lay on the slope of the hill Olivet, beyond the city's noise. He had with Him only eleven, for one had gone out into the night alone. Eight of these He leaves outside the garden, taking Peter, James, and John once more with Him. But not even can these three be partners in the agony, and He passes further into the shades of the olive-trees alone. The three sleep for sorrow, but we may look and listen. What a cry it is! and what an agony! "as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground." He prayed more earnestly; but still the prayer is in the spirit of obedience—"Not my will, but Thine be done." The victory is gained. He came not to do His own will, but the Father's; and even in the bitterness of the agony He puts the Father's will first, and so the victory is gained. Now He can meet the traitor calmly, the crown of thorns will be endured, the shout of "Crucify" will hurt Him only for pity's sake of those who madly utter it. One moment only the agony will seem to return, forcing the cry, "Why hast Thou forsaken me?" But the victory is not lost. Immediately will follow the words of quiet confidence and rest, "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit."