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ABRAHAM AND ISAAC.

BY REV. J. WESLEY JOHNSTON, D. D., OF BROOKLYN, N. Y.

(*Methodist.*)

And He said, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.—Genesis xxii., 2.

THE first verse of this chapter is very significant. Let us read it. "And it came to pass that after these things God did tempt Abraham." What things are these which are here spoken of? In order to answer this question, we need to go back several chapters in this story, for only by doing so can we understand the nature and purpose of our text.

The first time that the name of Abram appears in the Scriptures, is where we find him living with his fathers in the land of the Chaldees. But the promise that had been made concerning the redemption of the world, was now beginning to assume a definite form, and so there is a Divine command for Abram to leave his land and his kindred and journey into Canaan. He was then over seventy years of age, and had doubtless formed many dear and congenial ties, but with strange obedience and sublime faith, he starts out upon this most eventful pilgrimage; and nothing is more suggestive in this pilgrimage than to notice that everywhere the patriarch halted, there he built an altar unto the Lord. This was one of the first things that he did. Nor did it make any difference with what people he sojourned, there the altar was set up, until the whole path over which he had traveled was marked and dotted with these sacred stones upon which he had offered his sacrifice. And in doing this he was building wiser than he knew. He was making the entire land holy, a name which it bears to-day; he was laying the foundations for the synagogues and temples which afterwards would stand

determine to take step after step in His commandments, and your experience will be as the history of all who have deeply turned to God has been.

God will meet you in the way when you are going. He will manifest Himself to you. So seeking you will find. It is not for us to see the Divine compassion of that face as the Apostles saw it when they literally kept His commandments and left all and followed Him; nor is it for us to hear the persuasive accents of the voice which said: "Come unto Me all ye who travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Many a convulsion has swept over the face of the earth since then; many an empire has crumbled to decay. But across the gulf of ages and down the stream of human generations the living form of the Saviour comes to meet us still, and although far removed from Him by the earthly measurements of time and space, we can draw near to Him with the offering of a pure and obedient heart, and in so far as we keep His commandments, and especially His new commandment of love, in a simple, humble way, He will love us and will assuredly manifest Himself as the Holy One, The Comforter, the Prince of Peace, the altogether lovely.

Shall we not from this moment cease our questionings and mis-giving, and put His word to the simple, practical test He desires of us?

THE LESSON OF BETHESDA.

By REV. THEO. L. CUYLER, D. D.

Arise, take up thy bed and walk—St. John v., 8.

WHY did our Lord single out one sufferer, amid the many at the Pool of Bethesda? There were a multitude of impotent folk lying in the five porches or colonnades, waiting for the moving of the waters. But we do not read that the Divine Healer wrought a miracle for any more than this single invalid. The reason, I conjecture, is this: No one at that pool of mercy was so pitiably unbefriended as this man. He had lain there a long time, and been tantalized by seeing other and nimbler patients reach the healing waters before he could creep in. Others had friends to help them. But this poor forsaken creature had no one, not even a wife or a child, to assist him into the pool. Suffering

often makes people selfish. Perhaps, then, the loving Lord intended to rebuke the selfishness of the neglectful, as well as to show His sympathy for the neglected, by curing this one friendless cripple on the spot. There is a beautiful lesson here for us. Beside every pool of privilege or mercy in human life, there are one or more unbelieved sufferers, whose trials are aggravated by seeing others relieved, but no relief comes to them. Jesus teaches us to look after those who have nobody to care for them.

This is one lesson to be learned at Bethesda—which signifies the “house of mercy.” There is another lesson which we would press home upon all our unconverted readers. It fits their case exactly. In all our congregations are more or less of spiritually diseased persons, who are seen every Sabbath in God’s house of mercy. Their disease is sin. Whether blinded by it, or lamed, or withered, or paralyzed, the root of the malady is a sinful, unbelieving heart. They expect, at some time or other, to become Christians. Not one of them expects to “make his bed in hell.” Yet every one of them does lie, and persists in lying, upon a bed of criminal delay—waiting for they can hardly tell what. A word now to each of these.

One of you, perhaps, is waiting for a powerful revival, when the waters will be greatly troubled, and then you will be cured. But Christ nowhere tells sinners to wait for revivals. “*Now* is your day of salvation ;” and now don’t mean to-morrow. Jesus Christ is as close to you to-day as He ever will be. No one else can ever cure your wicked heart. Here is another unconverted person who is waiting for some “angel” in the shape of a powerful, thrilling sermon, or a peculiar providence which shall arouse you and do the needed work. You are mistaken. If you thus dictate to God, He will not do your bidding. A greater than any angel is beside you now ; neither is there salvation in any other. It is not more sermons you need, nor startling providences ; you need Jesus.

Another is waiting for “more conviction.” How much do you require in order to accept Christ ? How much did the cripple require at Bethesda ? If you admit that you are a sinner, and that, unless Jesus saves you, you will be lost, this is enough conviction to start with. To tell God that you will never serve Him until He smites you with intense sorrow for sin, is an insult ; it increases your guilt. No “angel” is going to trouble your stagnant heart with healing power while you are insulting God. Nor need you wait for

some wonderful conversion. To each one of you lingerers and loiterers in sin, let me say you are cheating yourself with the devil's delusion.

Your immediate duty is all condensed into that one pithy sentence which Jesus spake to the cripple at the pool: "Arise, take up thy bed, and walk." You are on your bed now. You put yourself there by your own sin. You have kept yourself there by your own choice. Every sinner is a sinner because he chooses to be; and you are no exception. Jesus commands you to repent, and trust Him, and follow Him. The moment you are willing to obey, He gives you strength to obey. Christ commanded that poor, miserable creature at Bethesda, who had been "in that case" for thirty-eight years, to "stand up." What, on those weak and withered limbs? Yes; for he could have no others to stand on. And the moment he obeys, and makes the honest attempt, a new power shoots through the nerves and muscles. The man is not lifted up. He rises up himself, and on his own limbs. But Jesus furnishes the strength. The man wanted to get up, and made a resolute effort to get up, and a supernatural power came into him, and enabled him to get up. His part in this happy transaction was *faith*; Christ's part was *grace*. Put the two together, and you have the history of every conversion that ever took place in our world.

Now what hinders every unconverted sinner who reads these lines from being healed at once? To lie still means guilt, uneasiness of conscience, and final death. It means a wasted life here, and hell hereafter. The first act you honestly perform to please Christ breaks the spell. The first prayer you breathe sincerely for a new heart, and the first sin you refuse because Jesus bids you, puts you on your feet. These steps are all your steps. But the Divine love moves you to take them, and gives you the sufficient strength.

Here is the transcendent lesson of Bethesda. It teaches every sinner who desires salvation that all he must do is to *obey Jesus*. The "angel" you wait for will never come. Death will soon stand beside your "bed" of guilty delay. Jesus is already beside you with His warm heart of Love. His short, simple command is: "Arise, take up thy bed and *walk*."

NOTICE that if we pray as Jesus would have us to do, we come to God as sons who care more for the Father's interests than for our own.