



The Bible for Home and School

SAINT MARK

Volume 8

JOHN PATERSON SMYTH

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by

JOHN PATERSON SMYTH



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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I

This series of books is intended for two classes of teachers:

1. For Teachers in Week Day and Sunday Schools.

For these, each book is divided into complete lessons. The lesson will demand preparation. Where feasible, there should be diligent use of commentaries and of any books indicated in the notes. As a *general rule*, I think the teacher should not bring the book at all to his class if he is capable of doing without it. He should make copious notes of the subject. The lesson should be thoroughly studied and digested beforehand, with all the additional aids at his disposal, and it should come forth at the class warm and fresh from his own heart and brain. But I would lay down no rigid rule about the use of the Lesson Book. To some it may be a burden to keep the details of a long lesson in the memory; and, provided the subject has been very carefully studied, the Lesson Book, with its salient points carefully marked in coloured pencil, may be a considerable help. Let each do what seems best in his particular case, only taking care to satisfy his conscience that it is not done through laziness, and that he can really do best for his class by the plan which he adopts.

2. For Parents

Who would use it in teaching their children at home. They need only small portions, brief little lessons of about ten minutes each night. For these, each chapter is divided into short sections. I should advise that on the first night only the Scripture indicated should be read, with some passing remarks and

questions to give a grip of the story. That is enough. Then night after night, go on with the teaching, taking as much or as little as one sees fit.

I have not written out the teaching in full as a series of readings which could be read over to the child without effort or thought. With this book in hand, a very little preparation and adaptation will enable one to make the lesson more interesting and more personal, and to hold the child's attention by questioning. Try to get his interest. Try to make him talk. Make the lesson conversational. Don't preach.

II

Hints for Teaching

An ancient Roman orator once laid down for his pupils the three-fold aim of a teacher:

1. PLACERE (TO INTEREST)

2. DOCERE (TO TEACH)

3. MOVERE (TO MOVE)

- 1. To interest the audience (in order to teach them).
- 2. To teach them (in order to move them).
- 3. To move them to action.

On these three words of his I hang a few suggestions on the teaching of this set of Lessons.

1. Placere (to interest)

I want especially to insist on attention to this rule. Some teachers seem to think that to interest the pupils is a minor matter. It is not a minor matter, and the pupils will very soon let you know it. Believe me, it is no waste of time to spend hours during the week in planning to excite their interest to the utmost. Most of the complaints of inattention would cease at once if the teacher would give more study to rousing their interest. After all, there is little use in knowing the facts of your subject, and being anxious about the souls of the pupils, if all the time that you are teaching, these pupils are yawning and taking no interest in what you say. I know some have more aptitude

for teaching than others. Yet, after considerable experience of teachers whose lesson was a weariness to the flesh, and of teachers who never lost attention for a moment, I am convinced, on the whole, that the power to interest largely depends on the previous preparation.

Therefore, do not content yourself with merely studying the teaching of this series. Read widely and freely. Read not only commentaries, but books that will give local interest and colour—books that will throw valuable sidelights on your sketch.

But more than reading is necessary. You know the meaning of the expression, "*Put yourself in his place.*" Practise that in every Bible story, using your imagination, living in the scene, experiencing, as far as you can, every feeling of the actors. To some this is no effort at all. They feel their cheeks flushing and their eyes growing moist as they project themselves involuntarily into the scene before them. But though it be easier to some than to others, it is in some degree possible to all, and the interest of the lesson largely depends on it. I have done my best in these books to help the teacher in this respect. But no man can help another much. Success will depend entirely on the effort to put yourself in his place.

In reading the Bible chapter corresponding to each lesson, I suggest that the teacher should read part of the chapter, rather than let the pupils tire themselves by "reading round." My experience is that this "reading round" is a fruitful source of listlessness. When his verse is read, the pupil can let his mind wander till his turn comes again, and so he loses all interest. I have tried, with success, varying the monotony. I would let them read the first round of verses in order; then I would make them read out of the regular order, as I called their names; and sometimes, if the lesson were long, I would again and again

interrupt by reading a group of verses myself, making remarks as I went on. To lose their interest is fatal.

I have indicated also in the lessons that you should not unnecessarily give information yourself. Try to question it *into* them. If you tell them facts which they have just read, they grow weary. If you ask a question, and then answer it yourself when they miss it, you cannot keep their attention. Send your questions around in every sort of order, or want of order. Try to puzzle them—try to surprise them. Vary the form of the question, if not answered, and always feel it to be a defeat if you ultimately fail in getting the answer you want.

2. Docere (to teach)

You interest the pupil in order that you may *teach*. Therefore, teach definitely the Lesson that is set you. Do not be content with interesting him. Do not be content either with drawing spiritual teaching. Teach the facts before you. Be sure that God has inspired the narration of them for some good purpose.

When you are dealing with Old Testament characters, do not try to shirk or to condone evil in them. They were not faultless saints. They were men like ourselves, whom God was helping and bearing with, as He helps and bears with us, and the interest of the story largely depends on the pupil realizing this.

In the Old Testament books of this series you will find very full chapters written on the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the election of Jacob, the Sun standing still, the slaughter of Canaanites, and other such subjects. In connection with these, I want to say something that especially concerns teachers. Your pupils, now or later, can hardly avoid coming in contact with the flip-pant scepticism so common nowadays, which makes jests at the story of the sun standing still, and talks of the folly of believing that all humanity was condemned because Eve ate an apple

thousands of years ago. This flippant tone is in the air. They will meet with it in their companions, in the novels of the day, in the popular magazine articles on their tables at home. You have, many of you, met with it yourselves; you know how disturbing it is; and you probably know, too, that much of its influence on people arises from the narrow and unwise teaching of the Bible in their youth. Now you have no right to ignore this in your teaching of the Bible. You need not talk of Bible difficulties and their answers. You need not refer to them at all. But teach the truth that will take the sting out of these difficulties when presented in after-life.

To do this requires trouble and thought. We have learned much in the last fifty years that has thrown new light for us on the meaning of some parts of the Bible; which has, at any rate, made doubtful some of our old interpretations of it. We must not ignore this. There are certain traditional theories which some of us still insist on teaching as God's infallible truth, whereas they are really only human opinions about it, which may possibly be mistaken. As long as they are taught as human opinions, even if we are wrong, the mistake will do no harm. But if things are taught as God's infallible truth, to be believed on peril of doubting God's Word, it may do grave mischief, if in after-life the pupil finds them seriously disputed, or perhaps false. A shallow, unthinking man, finding part of this teaching false, which has been associated in his mind with the most solemn sanctions of religion, is in danger of letting the whole go. Thus many of our young people drift into hazy doubt about the Bible. Then we get troubled about their beliefs, and give them books of Christian evidences to win them back by explaining that what was taught them in childhood was not *quite* correct, and needs now to be modified by a broader and slightly differ-

ent view. But we go on as before with the younger generation, and expose them in their turn to the same difficulties.

Does it not strike you that, instead of this continual planning to win men back from unbelief, it might be worthwhile to try the other method of not exposing them to unbelief? Give them the more careful and intelligent teaching at first, and so prepare them to meet the difficulties by-and-by.

I have no wish to advocate any so-called “advanced” teaching. Much of such teaching I gravely object to. But there are truths of which there is no question amongst thoughtful people, which somehow are very seldom taught to the young, though ignorance about them in after-life leads to grave doubt and misunderstanding. Take, for example, the gradual, progressive nature of God’s teaching in Scripture, which makes the Old Testament teaching as a whole lower than that of the New. This is certainly no doubtful question, and the knowledge of it is necessary for an intelligent study of Scripture. I have dealt with it where necessary in some of the books of this series.

I think, too, our teaching on what may seem to us doubtful questions should be more fearless and candid. If there are two different views each held by able and devout men, do not teach your own as the infallibly true one, and ignore or condemn the other. For example, do not insist that the order of creation must be accurately given in the first chapter of Genesis. You may think so; but many great scholars, with as deep a reverence for the Bible as you have, think that inspired writers were circumscribed by the science of their time.

Do not be too positive that the story of the Fall *must* be an exactly literal narrative of facts. If you believe that it is, I suppose you must tell your pupil so. But do not be afraid to tell him also that there are good and holy and scholarly men who think of it as a great old-world allegory, like the parable of the Prodigal

Son, to teach in easy popular form profound lessons about sin. Endeavour in your Bible teaching to be thoroughly truthful: to assert nothing as certain which is not certain, nothing as probable which is not probable, and nothing as more probable than it is. Let the pupil see that there are some things that we cannot be quite sure about, and let him gather insensibly from your teaching the conviction that truth, above all things, is to be loved and sought, and that religion has never anything to fear from discovering the truth. If we could but get this healthy, manly, common-sense attitude adopted now in teaching the Bible to young people, we should, with God's blessing, have in the new generation a stronger and more intelligent faith.

3. *Movere (to move)*

All your teaching is useless unless it have this object: to move the heart, to rouse the affections toward the love of God, and the will toward the effort after the blessed life. You interest in order to teach. You teach in order to move. *That* is the supreme object. Here the teacher must be left largely to his own resources. One suggestion I offer: don't preach. At any rate, don't preach much lest you lose grip of your pupils. You have their attention all right while their minds are occupied by a carefully prepared lesson; but wait till you close your Bible, and, assuming a long face, begin, "And now, boys," &c., and straightway they know what is coming, and you have lost them in a moment.

Do not change your tone at the application of your lesson. Try to keep the teaching still conversational. Try still in this more spiritual part of your teaching to question into them what you want them to learn. Appeal to the judgment and to the conscience. I can scarce give a better example than that of our Lord in teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan. He first interested His pupil by putting His lesson in an attractive

form, and then He did not append to it a long, tedious moral. He simply asked the man before Him, "Which of these three *thinkest thou?*"—i.e., "What do you think about it?" The interest was still kept up. The man, pleased at the appeal to his judgment, replied promptly, "He that showed mercy on him;" and on the instant came the quick rejoinder, "Go, and do thou likewise." Thus the lesson ends. Try to work on that model.

Now, while forbidding preaching to your pupils, may I be permitted a little preaching myself? This series of lessons is intended for Sunday schools as well as weekday schools. It is of Sunday-school teachers I am thinking in what I am now about to say. I cannot escape the solemn feeling of the responsibility of every teacher for the children in his care. Some of these children have little or no religious influence exerted on them for the whole week except in this one hour with you. Do not make light of this work. Do not get to think, with good-natured optimism, that all the nice, pleasant children in your class are pretty sure to be Christ's soldiers and servants by-and-by. Alas! for the crowds of these nice, pleasant children, who, in later life, wander away from Christ into the ranks of evil. Do not take this danger lightly. Be anxious; be prayerful; be terribly in earnest, that the one hour in the week given you to use be wisely and faithfully used.

But, on the other hand, be very hopeful too, because of the love of God. He will not judge you hardly. Remember that He will bless very feeble work, if it be your best. Remember that He cares infinitely more for the children's welfare than you do, and, therefore, by His grace, much of the teaching about which you are despondent may bring forth good fruit in the days to come. Do you know the lines about "The Noisy Seven"?—

“I wonder if he remembers—
Our sainted teacher in heaven—
The class in the old grey schoolhouse,
Known as the ‘Noisy Seven’?”

“I wonder if he remembers
How restless we used to be,
Or thinks we forget the lesson
Of Christ and Gethsemane?”

“I wish I could tell the story
As he used to tell it then;
I’m sure that, with Heaven’s blessing,
It would reach the hearts of men.

“I often wish I could tell him,
Though we caused him so much pain
By our thoughtless, boyish frolic,
His lessons were not in vain.

“I’d like to tell him how Willie,
The merriest of us all,
From the field of Balaclava
Went home at the Master’s call.

“I’d like to tell him how Ronald,
So brimming with mirth and fun,
Now tells the heathen of India
The tale of the Crucified One.

“I’d like to tell him how Robert,
And Jamie, and George, and ‘Ray,’
Are honoured in the Church of God—
The foremost men of their day.

“I’d like, yes, I’d like to tell him
What his lesson did for me:
And how I am trying to follow
The Christ of Gethsemane.

“Perhaps he knows it already,
For Willie has told him, maybe,
That we are all coming, coming
Through Christ of Gethsemane.

“How many besides I know not
Will gather at last in heaven,
The fruit of that faithful sowing,
But the sheaves are already seven.”

Letter to the Teacher

Very little preface is here required. Read over carefully Lesson II on “THE KINGDOM OF GOD” before you begin your teaching. Try to work out for yourself the thoughts just sketched there in bare outline. All through the Gospel of St. Mark, keep before you this thought of the “Kingdom of God” as the ideal ever present to the mind of our Blessed Lord—a colony of Heaven to be founded on earth, like the colonies of Rome founded throughout the ancient world—a colony whose laws should be the laws of Heaven; whose work and amusements should be according to the will of “The King;” whose subjects should be those who “suffer long, and are kind, who envy not, who vaunt not, who seek not their own;” and whose future should be in the perfect “Kingdom of God” above. Think of the Roman colony at Philippi, whose citizens so identified themselves with the far-off imperial city, rejecting “customs not lawful for us to receive or to observe, being Romans.” (Acts xvi. 21). Think of St. Paul’s teaching about the colony of Heaven to these same Philippians, so proud of being citizens of Imperial Rome: “Our citizenship is in Heaven.” (Philippians iii. 20). Try to press on the children this thought of the Kingdom of God on earth as a colony of Heaven. There are “customs not lawful for us to receive or observe, being members of the Kingdom of God.” Try to teach them the real, practical religion implied in being members of that Kingdom. Teach them that Bible-reading, and Prayer, and Sacraments are not in themselves religion—the work of the Kingdom—but rather the *indispensable* source of strengthening and stimulating power for performing that religion, that work of “The Kingdom.” Show that the Incarnation, the Atonement, the coming of the Holy Ghost were all necessary parts of this ideal of Christ.

The story of the founding of the Church in the early chapters of the Acts is included as part of this book. We cannot say that the Church is the perfect embodiment of Christ's ideal; but it is the best approach to it that humanity has attained. Like a sculptor trying to embody a very noble conception in very rough, intractable material, so is the Lord trying to embody His ideal in imperfect humanity. It is very rough, very imperfect; but it is in some degree embodying the conception, and growing more desirous of embodying it, we trust, as the ages go on. Try to make the children feel sympathy with this longing of their Master, to recognise all that they owe to Him, and to see their duty towards that Kingdom of His into which they came at Baptism. Let them think of Him as looking lovingly down upon their individual lives, watching eagerly to help them towards beautiful deeds, rejoicing in their every struggle toward the right, and thinking wistfully of the day when His desire shall be accomplished; when, in the blessed streets of the Kingdom above, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." Thus may you help to teach your children real religion; not the religion of mere fruitless church-going; not the religion of mere emotions and excitements, which we hear so much of to-day, but the sound, manly, common-sense religion taught them in the *Church Catechism*, "to do my duty in that state of life unto which it hath pleased God to call me."

LESSON I
Introductory

ST. MARK I. 1-13.

“The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”

(1) It is important to divide this Gospel clearly into: Introduction: i. vv. 1-13 Part I: Christ’s public ministry in Galilee, ch. i.-x. Part II: His ministry and death in Judæa, ch. x.-xvi. Mark those divisions in the children’s Bibles.

(2) In teaching the importance of the Church in God’s plan for the world, avoid all arrogant talk about our separated brethren. Try to impress the idea of a divinely guided Society of baptized people, who should all be one—that separations are weakening it and injuring it, and displeasing Christ. Our Church has been to blame as well as Dissenters. Our duty is to ask Christ to help us to bring all together again, so that the sin of separation may cease, and the Church of God be strong and united, as He desires.

(3) The game of word-picturing here suggested, if not overdone, is very interesting to children. If the teacher has any vividness of imagination, he can hold them spell-bound, and can impart warmth and life and colour to the Bible story that will make it most interesting to them.

1. HOW WERE THE GOSPELS WRITTEN?

Meaning of “Gospel”? How many Gospels? One. How many separate accounts of it? Are all exactly the same? Why not?

Illustrate four separate boys telling of an accident. Would they say exactly the same things? Each tells from his own point of view what struck him most. One notices something that another does not, etc. So different. But their stories in the main are the same. Show the gain of four accounts of our Lord's life and work. Like four pictures of Him from different points of view.

Which came first, the Church or the Bible? Which first, the telling or the writing of the Gospel story? Which would come first to-day in China? Of course, the Church comes first. The Lord first founded a Divine Society, and then through that Society gave the Divine Book. Men come first and tell the story of Christianity, and teach and baptize converts. Then after some years they begin to prepare a written or printed Bible. Thus in China to-day. Thus also in early days. The Gospels did not begin by the Evangelist sitting down one day to compose his Gospel straight off, as we write books. The Gospels are just the stories told in their preaching by the apostles and disciples everywhere, and gathered together and written down after several years had passed. Every day St. Peter, St. Matthew, St. John, and other teachers sent by the Church were telling the stories of Christ's life. St. Matthew told it to Jews in Judæa; St. John to Gentiles at Ephesus. So told in different ways. Each told what he knew best, and what was most suited for his hearers. By constantly telling the same things they got to tell them well—to leave out what was unimportant—to dwell on what was most powerful for touching men's hearts. Thus the guidance of the Holy Spirit was preparing for the writing of the Gospels.

The Gospel, therefore, was first *oral*, or spoken. Then people began to write down the separate stories, lest they should be forgotten. Probably many accounts. (See Luke i. 1-3.) But the greatest and best and most perfect were those four which we now have—the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and

St. John, written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and chosen by the Church, under His guidance, to be preserved and taught, while the other accounts gradually vanished away. Remember it was through the Church that God gave and preserved the Bible. Remember, then, that the Church of Christ is a very sacred thing, and very important to be kept in mind. It is God's appointed means of helping the world. It is the Divine Society founded by Christ. It existed many years before a word of the New Testament was written. It prepared the Gospels under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. It bore witness to them. It preserved them through all the ages. It taught them to the world. It was the instrument used by the Holy Ghost for helping men everywhere to the knowledge of Christ. As far as we can see, there would be no Bible if there were no Church. People nowadays forget the sacred position of the Church. They think it means separate individuals, not one Divine Society. They split it up into hundreds of different bodies, who will not worship together; and then they ask, Where is the Church? Some people don't believe in the Church or its mission at all. (See Lesson on Acts II.) They do not understand what grand purposes the Church has accomplished, and what grand purposes God has still for it. Be you careful to remember it. Do all you can firmly, lovingly, prayerfully, to heal its unhappy divisions, for its Master's sake.

2. WHO WAS ST. MARK?

Would like to know something of writer of this Gospel. Look at Acts xii. 12. We hear of Mary, the mother of Mark, who had a house in Jerusalem. She seems to have been a person of some means and influence, whose house was a meeting-place for the early Christians in those dangerous days. Probably the Lord Jesus used to go there. Perhaps Lord's Supper instituted in its upper room. Most probably it was the upper room where

the Pentecost miracle took place. So the boy brought up in a Christian home. Knew the chief men of the Church. We read that Paul and Barnabas quarrelled about this young Mark (Acts xv. 36–40). Yet he was with Paul afterwards at Rome (Colossians iv. 10; Philemon 24). But Peter seems his especial friend and spiritual father. Came straight to his house to tell of escape (Acts xii. 12). And long years afterwards mentions Mark affectionately as being with him (1 Peter v. 13): “Marcus, my son.” Early Church writers soon after Apostles say that Mark was the “interpreter” of St. Peter—that he put down what Peter taught him of the life of the Lord. So that we might almost call this the Gospel of St. Peter. Pleasant to think of the aged Apostle talking so warmly to his young comrade about all the pleasant memories of the Lord, whom he so enthusiastically loved, and the young Marcus who, as a boy, had probably seen Jesus, and heard the people talk of Him in his mother’s house, writing down what Peter told him. Here is the account of a very early Christian named Papias, who is said to have been a hearer of St. John: “Mark, having become Peter’s interpreter, wrote accurately all that Peter mentioned. He did not, however, record in order either the things said or done by Christ, for he neither heard the Lord nor followed Him, but subsequently followed Peter, who used to frame his teaching in accordance with the needs (of his hearers), but not as though making a methodic narrative of the Lord’s discourses. So Mark made no error in writing down some things as Peter narrated them.”

3. “THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST”

To-day we have the introduction (ch. i. to v. 14). Then comes Part I. (chs. i. to x.)—an account of our Lord’s ministry in Galilee; and Part II.—His last visit to Jerusalem, with His death and resurrection. Repeat these divisions. Mark in Bible. Remember

them. St. Mark seems a very eager, hurrying writer. He makes his stories, like pictures, very bright and clear, and interesting, and always every picture with Jesus in the midst. But he crowds them in so fast that we can hardly keep up with him. Like a magic lantern, where the pictures are run in very rapidly one after another. In chap. i. he has run in ten separate little pictures, each a perfect and beautiful little story in itself. (See Revised Version, where they are marked by separate paragraphs.) We have only time to look at the first three to-day, and see THE LORD PREPARING FOR HIS WORK (vv. 1-14). This portion is the "Introduction to the Gospel." Now shut your eyes, and let me throw the pictures upon the screen.

(a) First is thrown upon the screen—the picture of a wilderness land, with its gloomy rocks and trees, and a rapid river running between the green, reedy banks. There is a crowd of all sorts of people—soldiers, and publicans, and Scribes, and Pharisees—some with anxious looks, some with mocking sneer; and, above them all, a pale, earnest face, and thin, worn form, with a hairy robe and a leathern girdle about his loins. His eyes are flashing sternly; his speech is eager and passionate; he looks like an ancient prophet of God; he makes them think of "Elias, who was to come." And the gay courtiers of Herod, and the rough soldiers of the Empire, and the sneering Pharisees, and the proud Sadducees have to listen to his terrible threats and warnings against sin. He tells all who are sorry for their sins to come down into the river to be baptized, that God may forgive them, and help them to be good. But he says: "I am only a poor humble preacher; I am but preparing for the Great Coming One whom the prophets told you of. He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost." So ends the first picture.

(b) Now shut your eyes again for the next. Here picture after the same manner the baptism of Jesus; prepare your descrip-

tion carefully beforehand. Watch to see if the interest is kept up; if not, let the game of picturing stop. Otherwise, go rapidly on to the third picture.

(c) A dreary desert plain, with the wild beasts swarming about it, looking for their prey, yet passing peacefully and lovingly about the feet of their Lord. Make your picture at the close of the forty days of awful struggle, and temptation, and hunger, when He is pale and wearied with the strain; when the devil has departed, and the angels are ministering to Him. Take trouble to bring out the feeling of awe for the infinite purity and majesty of the Lord. John, before whom the greatest quailed, yet felt himself unworthy to loose the thong of His shoe, so wonderfully was he touched by that majesty of goodness—the fierce, wild beasts forgot their fierceness in His loving presence—the great, strong angels of God, who with a touch could destroy Jericho, were bowing at His feet, rejoicing to do Him service, and wondering that He should stoop to this poor life. What means it all? That the King of the strong angels—the Creator of all things—had come down to poor, humble, sinful men and women, to be their brother on earth, to save their souls, to help them to be good. “God so loved the world.” (John iii. 16). Thus our Blessed Saviour prepared for His ministry. Next day we shall see Him fully engaged in it.