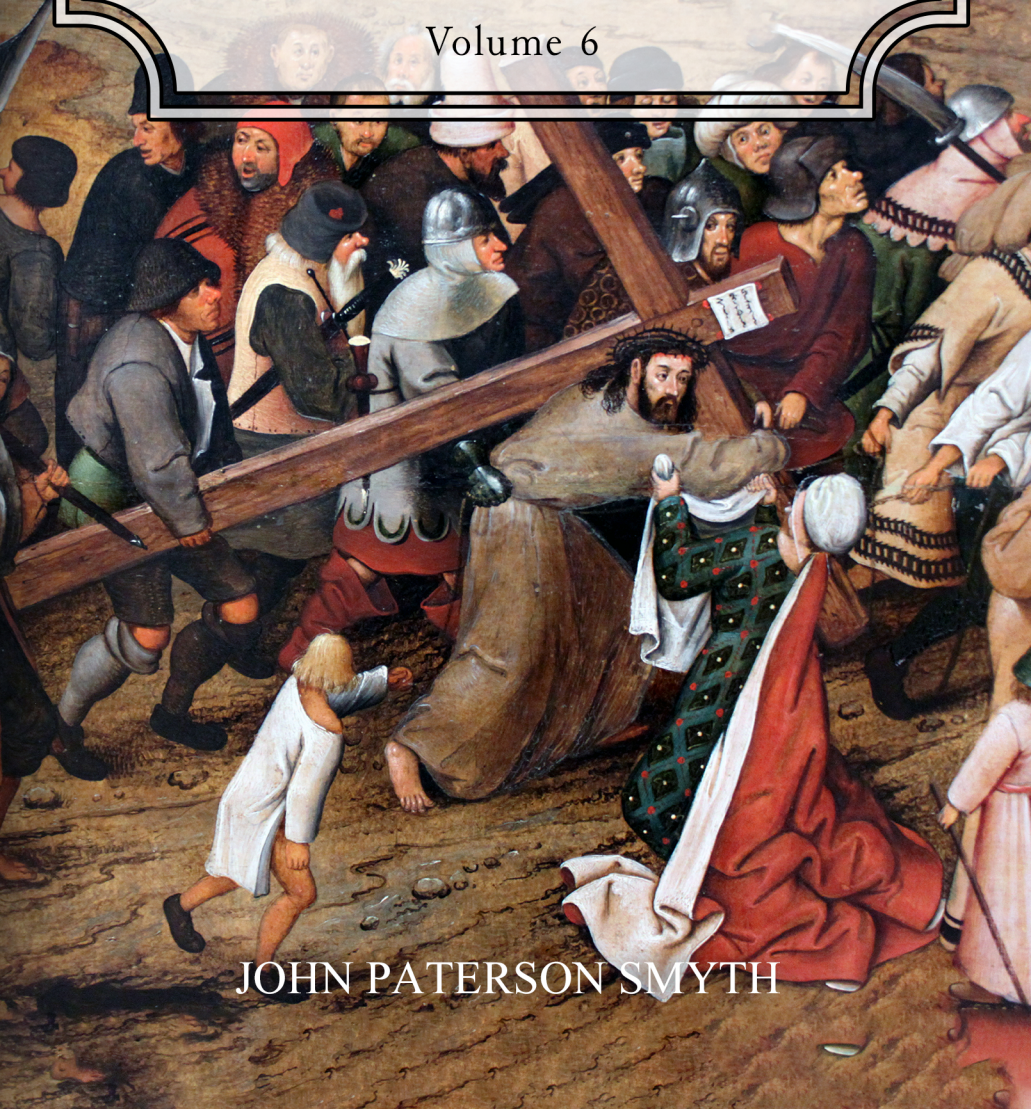


The Bible for Home and School

THE ROAD *to* JERUSALEM

WHEN THE CHRIST CAME

Volume 6



JOHN PATERSON SMYTH

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The Road to Jerusalem

by

JOHN PATERSON SMYTH



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INTRODUCTORY

LESSON I

A Harvest Festival in Jerusalem

ST. JOHN VII. 14-18 AND 25-52.

Do not read this Scripture at beginning. Wait for its right place after introductory matter, and trace on map the journey from Capernaum to Jerusalem.

Point out first that our Lord's public life divides itself into two parts:

- 1. The Public Ministry in Galilee,
- 2. Going up to Jerusalem to die,

and that the first of these has been dealt with in the previous lessons. Now open all Bibles and look at St. Luke ix. 51 and make all pupils repeat this important verse:

NOW WHEN THE TIME WAS WELL NIGH COME THAT HE SHOULD BE RECEIVED UP, HE STEADFASTLY SET HIS FACE TO GO TO JERUSALEM.

1. HOW ST. LUKE WROTE HIS GOSPEL

We are now beginning second part of the Lord's life. What writer has written this verse? St. Luke. Now put a mark in every Bible at this verse. Then let pupils turn over to xviii. 14, and hold this intervening sheaf of pages separate. This is a new section which St. Luke has inserted in the Gospel. It is mainly the memories of the Road to Jerusalem which he had gathered from

old disciples and friends who had been with Jesus thirty years before. And this verse just read contains the opening words.

How St. Luke wrote his Gospel is an interesting story. We find him in the Acts and St. Paul's Epistles—a young physician of literary instincts, travelling about with St. Paul. He carried with him in his baggage two manuscript books. One was a Diary, which was afterwards to be published as a Life of St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles; the other, to be published first, was his chief book. He had set his heart on writing a Life of our Lord fuller than the other Gospels, and Paul was helping him. As he moved about he was continually meeting old disciples who had been with Jesus thirty years ago and who remembered many things not already written. Think of his delight the day he heard the lovely story of the Prodigal Son—or when he heard, perhaps from the Blessed Virgin herself in Jerusalem, the story of “when shepherds watched their flocks by night.” How he would hurry back to write them down. This whole section (chaps. ix to xviii) was mainly concerned with the Road to Jerusalem.

2. THE TWO STORIES

Now when Jesus bade good-bye to Galilee, He was going up to the Harvest Festival (the Feast of Tabernacles), one of the great annual feasts, where He would find a million of Jews from all over the world assembled in Jerusalem, a splendid opportunity for teaching about His Kingdom. But the Jews would not listen. They turned Him out every time He got in, and tried to kill Him. So He had to go and teach outside in the roads and villages where He could, and wait to get in again at the next Festival. That is why the whole story up to the Crucifixion is about six months long. It was a hard time, travelling in the winter and always in danger.

Long after, another disciple, St. John, wrote his memories of

this time. Curiously, he only tells each time of what happened in Jerusalem, while St. Luke only tells of what happened *outside* Jerusalem on the road. It is like two stories of the Siege of Paris in 1870, where one writer was inside and couldn't get out, and the other writer was outside and couldn't get in. We have to combine the town story of St. John with the country story of St. Luke to find what happened.

3. HARVEST FESTIVAL IN JERUSALEM

Now we resume the narrative. He left Galilee and travelled towards Jerusalem. The Samaritans stopped Him (St. Luke ix. 52) and He had to change His route. After a while He got to Bethany, four miles out of Jerusalem. There He was received in the house of Lazarus and Martha and Mary, who afterwards became His very close friends. Do you remember the wonderful things that happened about Lazarus six months later? There He slept that night, while right across the valley were the lights of Jerusalem and the vast assembled crowds. Next day He made His entrance. Therefore we must leave St. Luke's country story and go to St. John's town story.

Here read St. John vii. 14–18 and 25–32.

Now it is the 18th of October, A.D. 28 (the month Tisri). The Feast of Tabernacles, the Harvest Festival, is in full swing, the brightest, gladdest holiday of all the year. The Feast of a nation resting from its work—"The Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field." Everybody went to this popular festival. It was a joyous, dramatic representation of the old Wilderness days when their fathers dwelt in tents. People lived in the open air in booths of green branches of olive and vine with bunches of ripe fruit hanging

over the booths. There they kept holiday. The old Rabbis used to say, "He who has not seen this Festival does not know what joy means."

4. NICODEMUS AND THE POLICE

The Festival was half over when Jesus appeared. There had been much disappointment, for He was already famous and the strangers all wanted to see and hear Him. Unexpectedly they came on Him teaching in the Temple. What first surprised them as they listened? (v. 15). What did Jesus reply? "If any man willeth," etc. What did that mean? Think. Yes. To know God is not a mere matter of brains. It is the Heart and the Will more than the intellect that finds God. He that willeth to do God's will, he shall know. So a very clever man may miss Him, while a poor ignorant man finds Him. That is the encouragement for plain, simple people.

Now as He goes out, St. John hears the muttered talk. They are wondering why the rulers do not arrest Him. "Is not this He," etc. (vv. 25–27). "Is it because they know He is the very Christ?" Was it? Ah! no. Why did they not stop Him? They dared not lay hands on Him with that sympathetic multitude around. As we saw already, the common people were on His side. And the crowd of foreign Jews were not afraid of the priests like the Jerusalem Jews. So the rulers were afraid. But they could not stand it when they heard the multitude speaking in His favour and believing in Him. What did they plan? (v. 32). So that evening when He came back, He saw the police in the crowd, and He knew why. He knew what was coming. So He sadly tells the people: "I shall not be much longer with you on earth. I go my way to—" Whither? What did the hostile Jews think? (v. 35).

Did the police arrest Him? Tell me what happened? (vv. 45, etc.). Who else stood up for Him? Do you remember Nicodemus

before? (St. John iii). He had not forgotten the young Teacher who so impressed him last year when he timidly “came to Jesus by night.” He admired Jesus and had a lingering affection for Him, and at any rate he wanted to see fair play. Tell about him here (v. 50) and what the rulers replied. And I am afraid Nicodemus had not the courage to fight for Him further just then. Six months later, when Jesus was dead, we find the good old man coming to bury Him.

5. TWO STARTLING PRONOUNCEMENTS

Jesus startled them all greatly next day. You see, He was now, as the end approached, beginning to tell who He was. In Galilee He had moved amongst the people as a kindly human friend. They thought Him a prophet for His noble teaching, and they looked with wondering awe at His great miracles. They did not know what to think of Him, only that many of them loved Him. Now it seemed as if He wanted that million of foreign Jews to carry home more solemn impressions—that He wanted the hostile Jews of Jerusalem to know who He was before they killed Him.

The Temple was crowded. All eyes were fixed on the solemn ceremonial as the water and wine from the golden ewer were poured out upon the altar to symbolise the giving of water in the desert long ago, to thank God for showers of water on their thirsty land, and, more than that, to pray Him for showers of blessing on thirsting souls thirsting for God. Then came a dramatic pause as the sacrifices were brought in. And St. John remembers how at this critical moment, in the waiting silence, rang out a clear, solitary voice. What did it say? “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.” It was the Son of God himself looking on thirsting souls thirsting for

God. And St. John, writing long afterwards, sees the meaning in the light of after events: "This spake He of the Spirit which they that believed on Him should receive."

Why did this startle and anger the Jews? Yes. It seemed an awful thing to say. Was He divine, or was He mad? This lone, mysterious prophet saying of God's gift to thirsting souls: If any man thirst, let him come unto Me.

And again at the evening service, He startled them still more. The golden candelabra was blazing with light to commemorate the Pillar of Light which led their fathers in the desert—and in the first waiting pause that clear voice came again: "I am the Light of the World. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life!"

Surely these assembled pilgrims had a strange story to carry home. No man had ever heard such words before. And they were not without effect. "As He spake these things many believed on Him. But the others called it blasphemy. They took up stones to stone Him, but Jesus was hidden and went forth out of the Temple."

So ends His first attempt at Jerusalem. He must now flee to the wilderness outside with His little band, and there continue the message that He would leave for the world, which Jerusalem would not hear.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON I

- 1. Tell me how and why St. Luke wrote his gospel.
- 2. Tell of the two books in his baggage.
- 3. What is meant by the Town Story and Country Story?
- 4. Who lived in Bethany?
- 5. Why was the story of the Road six months long instead of a few days?
- 6. Relate fully the two daring things that the Lord said.
- 7. What was the result?

THE GOSPEL IN
THE VILLAGES

LESSON II

God's Fatherhood

ST. LUKE XV.

1. TEACHINGS OUTSIDE JERUSALEM

Now the narrative ceases for the present, and for several lessons we follow the teachings outside Jerusalem.

Recapitulate last lesson, briefly reminding why He had to leave Jerusalem. Evidently He means to return at next festival. Meantime, for many weeks He is now moving through the country outside, and giving very important teaching. The same thing happened when He was again expelled a couple of months later. We do not always know the exact order of the events or the teachings. So we shall drop the narrative for a while and try to learn the more important things taught outside.

2. THE THREE GREAT PARABLES

We have to depend chiefly on St. Luke and the new stories that he discovered. Now what do you think was the most precious teaching that he found out for his new book? All Christian people would say the three parables in St. Luke xv. I think it was on the road at Jericho that these were said, after the Lord had dined with Zaccheus and the publicans. (See v. 1, 2). One feels glad that the Pharisees did grumble, since it got us this delightful teaching about the heart of God. Now name the three parables? Yes. The shepherd who had a hundred sheep, and the

woman who had ten pieces of money, and the father who had two sons. And each had lost one, and because it was lost, they were more anxious about that one than about all the rest. You understand that. You would feel the same.

Now what had Jesus chiefly in mind to teach about? The heart of God. It was not the Lost Sheep, or the Lost Coin, or the Lost Son, but what? The feeling of the person who has lost them. Who is meant by the shepherd and the woman and the man? Our Father in Heaven. God. Be clear about this, and remember that He who told us was the Blessed Lord himself who came from heaven to reveal God's heart to us. So we may feel quite sure about it.

3. THE HEART OF GOD

Now suppose a wicked man or woman who had been sinning terribly against God, and now, tortured by conscience and very miserable, wishes he had not done these things, but feels God must be very angry and must send him to hell—so there is no hope for him. What would these stories of Jesus teach him? That maybe God would not be quite as severe as he feared? That maybe there was a chance that he might some day be forgiven? Is that all he could learn?

Oh, don't you see how much farther our Lord went? He says in the stories: "My son, God has been suffering about you all the time. God is not a big policeman trying to catch you tripping. God is the Father, caring much more than your own father or mother. God," He says, "is like that shepherd." What did the shepherd do? Left his ninety-nine sheep who were safe and went away over the mountains in spite of storm and rain and fatigue, seeking that lost sheep till he found it. That is God. What did the woman do—a poor woman who would greatly miss that coin? That is what God does who misses that lost sinner.

What of the prodigal's father, in his comfortable home with his faithful son beside him and all good things about him? Is he happy? No, says our Lord. He is thinking of his miserable boy in his sin—that is God. The sore heart wanting His child back.

4. TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Does it seem too good to be true? Why, it is true, even of your own poor father or mother, if you went wrong and broke their hearts. God has put that much of His Nature even into the hearts of poor sinful parents on earth. Do you think your mother would rest satisfied if her other children were good and you were bad and miserable? I remember a mother in a rich, beautiful home who said to me one day: "I never told you my great secret trouble—my boy who went wrong and ran away ten years ago—I don't know to-day if he is dead or alive, but, God help me! he is never out of my thoughts day or night!"

Oh, young people, think of your fathers and mothers! God has given you an awful responsibility, putting your hand on their heartstrings so that with a touch you can give them untold happiness or misery. They can't help it. God made them like that. And from them learn God. Jesus said once to the fathers and mothers in Galilee, "If ye, being evil, cannot help caring like that, how much more the Father in Heaven." If God does not care as much as your mother would, it is a poor business. But if He does? And "much more," our Lord says. Then we are living in a very wonderful world of love with that Father at the head of it! I think hardly anyone would stay away from God if they really believed that.

5. GOD SEEKING

Now there is something more to learn than God's love and pain. What were these people in the parable doing? Merely sor-

rowing? They were seeking to find what they had lost. “Seeking that which was lost until we find it.” Do you think God just waits coldly for His lost son to come back? Or is He seeking? Can you think of any way in which God is seeking to-day? Do you know what usually brings a sinner back? His conscience. The torment of it. Who put this conscience into us?

A man talked to me one day about his evil life. “Are you happy in it?” I asked him. “Happy!” he said. “No. Sometimes I go ahead without thinking much. Sometimes I lie awake at night and think of my mother and the old home, and think of what I am doing. It is just hell at such times.” No, it was not hell. Could you explain it? It was conscience. It was the stern love of God wanting him back, and seeking by this torture of conscience—seeking that which is lost, if so be that He may find it. Conscience is an awful, solemn thing, but a delightfully hopeful thing. It means God is suffering for you. God is making you suffer because He cannot bear to lose you. That is what Jesus says. Are you not glad that St. Luke discovered these three lovely parables?

6. GOD FINDING

Now read the ending of each of the parables, about the gladness of God’s finding. What did the shepherd say? The woman? The prodigal’s father? What does our Lord say about the joy in heaven? Would that make you think at all of pain in heaven? I think it should. For if there be joy with God over one that repenteth, must not there be pain with God over one that repenteth not? But it is the joy we are to think of here. Think of your own father or mother if you went wrong and nearly broke their hearts—if some day you came back sorrowful and changed and started out to live a life that gave them pleasure. Why, that little mother, bowed and troubled, would grow young again in the joy of it. From this learn God.

I was told of a young man who had shamed and made miserable his proud, silent old father. And he used to think of that father cursing him for what he had done. One night, with sorrowful heart, he stole back to the old home, but would not dare to face his father. He thought he would just peep through the window for one look and go away for ever. But he saw the stern old man on his knees, and through the opened window he just heard this: "O God, my heart is sore. Watch over my poor, unhappy boy, wherever he is this night!"

That, says Jesus, is the heart of God.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON II

- 1. What was St. Luke's most precious discovery?
- 2. When do you think our Lord said these?
- 3. Why should we not think this love and pain of God too good to be true?
- 4. What do you know of God's seeking?
- 5. The joy in heaven suggests also pain. Explain.

LESSON III

The Man Who Kept the
Law of Brotherhood
and the Man Who Did Not

FIRST READ OF THE MAN WHO KEPT THE LAW OF BROTHERHOOD
(LUKE X. 25-37).

NOW READ OF THE MAN WHO DID NOT (LUKE XVI. 19 TO END).

1. THE FATHER AND THE BROTHERS

What was subject of last lesson? The heart of God. The fatherhood of God.

Now can you see that this teaching about God's fatherhood forces us to think about brotherhood between ourselves? Why? Think. If God is our Father, what are we to each other? And if the Father is caring so tenderly for His poor human children, surely it must please Him that they care for each other, and surely He must be angry if they bring to each other unhappiness or wrong. So you cannot believe in the fatherhood without believing in God's law of brotherhood. Our Lord was always teaching it. You must forgive your offending brother till seventy times seven. You must be kindly even if he is ungrateful, "for the Father is kind to the ungrateful, and the evil, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." "This is my commandment, that ye love one another." "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brothers."

2. THE MAN WHO KEPT THIS LAW

Now we come to the two parables about it. (1) *The man who kept this law*. Tell me the story briefly. That bit of mountain road between Jerusalem and Jericho was about the most dangerous road in Palestine. Just as in London in the stories of one hundred years ago, some of the roads outside were so infested with robber bands that travellers had to go armed and protected—so here. The mountain gorges had robber caves, and travelling was very dangerous. Perhaps it was on this part of His road to Jerusalem that Jesus told this parable. You can see the whole picture. The traveller attacked, his attendants running away, the robbers assaulting him, robbing him, stripping him, leaving him half dead.

There he lies in the hot sun by the roadside, bleeding and moaning and hardly conscious. Now comes a Jerusalem priest riding by. He sees the man. He knows he ought to help him. I suppose he would say: "I am in a great hurry. There is no inn here. I could not delay to tend him. And probably the robbers are watching to fall on me, too. At any rate, other travellers will pass who can help him." So "he passed by on the other side." And the Father in heaven was looking. Then comes a Levite, who says the same thing, and perhaps feels that if the priest, his superior, could pass by, he might be excused for doing so too. Then came a third traveller—a Jew? No, a Samaritan, a race hated and despised by Jews. Surely he might pass by. This wounded Jew would perhaps despise and insult him. But this is a large-hearted, brotherly man. He never stops to think. His kind heart is touched. He is off his ass in a moment, bringing the wine and oil, binding up the wounds, placing him on his own ass, taking him to the next inn, taking care of him, and then, when he has to leave, giving money to the innkeeper to take care of him till he recovers.

Now you remember why Jesus told the story. A man had asked Him about religion, and Jesus told him in one sentence the whole of religion. Repeat it (v. 27). Yes, to love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself. That is the whole of religion—the fatherhood and the brotherhood. But this man has no idea of the great broad thought of Jesus that every man is your brother if you can do anything to help him. “Who is my neighbour?” he asks. Is it relatives, or Jews, or people who believe as I do? So Jesus says, I will tell you a story. And after the story He asks him a question. What? And the man saw at once. “He that shewed mercy on him.” And Jesus promptly replied: “Go and do likewise.” That is the law of brotherhood, and only the despised Samaritan had kept it and pleased God.

3. THE MAN WHO DID NOT KEEP THIS LAW

Now we come to the man who did not keep the Law of Brotherhood.

Perhaps St. Luke knew the previous parable already. He was putting it in his book. Imagine him one day talking of it to some of the old disciples who had been with Jesus on the Road thirty years ago. Somebody asks: “Do you know the other parable that He told us about the unbrotherly rich man and the beggar? It made a great impression on us.” (Tell me the story, briefly, of Dives and Lazarus). So St. Luke listens with delight to this dramatic story. He could see it before him as if acted on a stage. There was the lordly mansion and the halls crowded with merry guests and obsequious servants standing around. And the stately host, the “rich man clothed in purple and fine linen faring sumptuously every day.” And “the beggar named Lazarus lying at the gate full of sores, waiting for the crumbs from the rich man’s table, while the dogs came and licked his

sores.” That was our Lord’s striking picture of rich and poor in Jerusalem in His day. It is very different in our day? Show this.

Why does the Lord blame this rich man? Was he dishonest? Or cruel? Or otherwise wicked? No, he was just a respectable rich man who probably went to church and paid his tithes and was rather looked up to. Now then, what did Jesus see wrong in him? Just that he had no thought of the Divine brotherhood. He never thought of Lazarus as a brother in God’s big family. He did not forbid throwing him the broken meats with the dogs. But he never thought of him as a brother to be considered, to be spoken to pleasantly, or kindly treated. That was his sin.

4. DIVES IN THE OTHER WORLD

Then the Lord suddenly lifts the curtain again, and shows this rich man in another world. “He died and was buried.” That is all his friends saw as they put him in the grave. Is that all Jesus saw? No, He knew all about the other world where the soul had gone to. And He pictures the rich man there. Explain that “hell” here is misleading. It is not hell. It is Hades (see Revised Version), the place of the departed after death. The man is not in hell. But the man is in torment of conscience. That is the meaning of “tormented in this flame.” Jesus is always teaching that death is not the end. Life goes on. Character and responsibility and memory and conscience go on just the same. But in the white light of that other world, men see more clearly. There is the poor, little, shrivelled soul in a great, vast loneliness and in torment, for conscience is now awake. The poor, frightened soul is—

Alone, alone with his conscience
In that weird and lonely place.