Articles by Theo Stainton

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The Substitute Teacher (Sept 1958)

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This somewhat extraordinary approach to the matter of Sunday School teaching was presented at a conference of workers in this particular field of Christian service. The sentiments expressed are the outgrowth of much experience. Our brother is a secular school teacher by training who has applied this knowledge to the biblical and spiritual instruction of the children.

A teacher is one, who has a knowledge which he is able to impart to others. Those who listened to the teachings of the Lord Jesus were amazed at the authority with which He taught. Nicodemus, who was well instructed in all the teachings of his day, acknowledged the superiority of the Saviour when he said, “We know that Thou art a teacher come from God” (John 3:2).

When our Lord was about to return to the Father, having accomplished the victory of the cross, He commanded His disciples to do His work, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19).

The Apostle Paul thought he should do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth before his conversion on the Damascus road. From that time forward, his great desire was to know the Lord Jesus and the power of His resurrection. To him, God gave a vision of the high calling of the Christian witness, “We pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

Christ the incomparable Teacher, the One who was able to give expression to the mind of God, is exalted in the

heavenly places. On earth His teaching is committed to those who have gained the knowledge of Him. Those of us who seek to teach His Word to children are substitute teachers, substituting for the Lord of whom it was said, “Never man spake like this Man’’ (John 7:46).

As a substitute teacher, it is my obligation to become familiar with His teaching. I must seek to be like Him that my ways will commend the glad tidings that I bring. We remember His word, “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me.” If I learn of Him to become a true disciple, I shall acknowledge His Lordship. At the time of His baptism in the Jordan river by John the Baptist, God acknowledged Him from heaven in the words, “Thou art My beloved Son: in Thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). The substitute teacher, in his steps of obedience, needs this same commendation.

The Saviour was faithful in what might appear to us as small things. Multitudes often gathered to hear His teachings, yet He was ready to sit down to teach an individual — a Nicodemus (John 3), — a woman at the well (John 4). Surely the teacher, substituting for the Lord, should be willing to do likewise.

In one of the great comforting chapters of the Scriptures, the Lord was able to speak words to the disciples who were at that time unaware of their great need for His words. “My peace I leave with you” (John 14:27). The one who seeks to do the work of the Saviour must have this peace in his heart and able to carry its message to the unsaved in whose heart no peace lies. (Isa. 57:21).

Our Lord’s ways were regular. No one was ever to seek Him in vain and go away disappointed. There was one

man who was desirous to meet Him and unable to press his way through the crowd. In his determination to see Jesus, he reached an advantage point some distance down the road. Did the Lord stop, change His plans, and leave a seeking Zachaeus up the tree (Luke 19:4)? Our pathways, too, should be consistent, our responsibilities to those who depend on us should be undertaken carefully.

In their search for the truths of God, multitudes overstayed on the mountainside and were weary and hungry. The advice of the disciples was natural, “Send them away.” The Lord’s compassion led Him to meet their need in a way beyond what was expected of Him. By a miracle, He fed them (Matt. 5:32). Is there some extra service that presents itself to the teacher of the children? Then let us seek to do this also unto His glory.

The disciples sought to do His work at the request of a distressed father, but everything seemed to go wrong. A demented son was more than they could manage. When all were at their wit’s end, the Lord came into their midst and said, “Bring him hither to Me” (Matt. 17:17). And what was the secret of the difficulty? The Lord plainly told them that it was a lack of prayer and fasting.

We like to cheer our hearts with words of the chorus, “Some golden daybreak, Jesus will come.” When we stand before Him, how happy we shall be to hear His words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21)!