

BIBLE HERALD 1879

by Unknown

A collection of articles and writings from Bible Herald 1879, covering various biblical topics and Christian teaching.

6 Chapters

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Faith's Victory

THE Patriarchs had come forth from the place of nature, or of the flesh, in the faith of a promised inheritance in the land of Canaan. And what is to be noticed in the strength and victory of their faith is this—they cling to that promise in spite of two very severe trials of it; that is, in the face of the poverty and sorrow and disappointment which they constantly experienced in the place of the promise, and also in spite of the desirableness and attractions and advantages which they enjoyed outside of it.

This is much to be observed; and it may be encouragement to us in such a time as the present.

There was famine in Canaan in the days of Abraham, and again in the days of Isaac, and again in the days, of Jacob. Abraham, moreover, witnessed in that land the abominations of Sodom and the common strife and contention of the potsherd of the earth. Isaac is forced from one spot of it to another by the injurious treatment of the natives of that land; Jacob is forced out of it by the threats of his brother Esau; and, further, it was the scene of humbling and of discipline to each of them in their day, by reason of their own evil ways in the sight of the Lord.

Such was Canaan to the Patriarchs. They were, I may say, dishonored and disappointed, and well nigh heart-broken in that land of promise.. But that which lay outside it was altogether different. It was just as attractive to them as Canaan had, been trying and humbling.

Egypt, for instance, enriches Abraham when Canaan had left him at death's door; and to Jacob -the same Egypt had become the scene and the occasion of all that heart or flesh could have desired, for he came to the end of a weary pilgrimage in that land. He had known plenty of sorrow in Canaan, both before he left it for Padan-aram, and after he returned; but Egypt at last made up to him, and much more, for all his losses and sorrows. By royal grant he received the richest and fairest portion of it. He was honored and cherished there, and saw his family in increasing prosperity around him. The desires of his heart seemed all to get their answer there; and to crown all, Egypt restored to him what the wild beasts of Canaan had robbed him of-Joseph, whom he thought some wild beast in the former land had torn to pieces, was alive in Egypt, and the second man in the kingdom.

Here was Egyptian flattery and fascination indeed-and that, too, in full contrast with all that Canaan had been to him. At evening time there was light: but it was an evening in Egypt. His eye must well have desired the lengthening and lingering of such a sunset, and his heart must have been tempted to contrast with it the clouds of his morning and his noon-day in Canaan. But faith is called a conqueror. It tries many a question with nature, and in some of the saints gets many a fair and brilliant victory. And so was it here with Jacob, though it may be humbling to one's own heart to trace it. For we have here before us a beautiful witness that, in spite of all this, Canaan, and not Egypt, was the Patriarch's object.

This is the victory that overcame Egypt then, and overcomes the world to this hour. No recollections of sorrows or disappointments in Canaan, no present possessions of honors or

wealth in Egypt, moved. him. The promise of God ruled in his heart. Of Canaan, as promised 'of God, he spoke; in Canaan he hoped; in the place of his present prosperity he was a stranger, and thought of home only in the degraded and impoverished land he had left behind him. It was in Canaan he would. be buried. It was there he was in spirit when he blessed his children; and it was there he gave the double portion to his adopted first-born.

There is something very fine in this; and, for us, something significant and seasonable. For I may surely say of the present time through which we are passing, there is the poor Canaan and the wealthy and important Egypt. That which, like Canaan to the Patriarchs, connects itself with God in the thoughts of faith, is in a small and enfeebled state, while the -world around is growing in its proper 'greatness and strength and dignity every hour.

It may be hard to learn this lesson which Jacob practiced. We may see it on the page of his history, without finding it on any corresponding one of our own.

Joseph, however, after Jacob, illustrates this same power of faith. Egypt had received him when Canaan had cast him out. Out of the one land he had been sold as a bond-slave; in the other he had been placed on the second seat in the kingdom. But withal (for faith is " the victory that overcometh the world") Egypt never became Canaan to Joseph. The promise of God lived in Joseph's heart, as it had lived in Jacob's. Disappointments and sorrows in Canaan, flatteries and successes and honor in Egypt, wrought not their natural results in that heart, because it was thus the seat of the promise of God. This was in the vigorous words of the Apostle (in the patriarchal form which such energy would take), a " laying hold of eternal life," which some of us know so little of.

But I must observe something further. It is felt by us to be a serious and hazardous thing at times to let the poor world know that we have learned this lesson-that poor Canaan is better than wealthy Egypt. We fully understand that men cannot lightly have the good thing they are nourishing and improving thus slighted. It is a reproach on themselves when the world is undervalued.

There was a moment in Joseph's history, as I judge, when he felt this-when he had this experience of which I speak.

Jacob, his father, when dying, had made him swear that he would bury him in the land of Canaan. When Joseph came to act upon his oath, he seems to me to feel this-that he was now about to venture on a. serious and hazardous matter. He evidently sets himself as before a business which had its special difficulties. He was high at court, as we may say, for, as we read, the physicians, the state physicians, were his servants (Gen. 1:2), and we know the resources of the kingdom, the strength and wealth of the realm of Egypt, were at that moment under his hand. But still he hesitates about the matter of burying his father in Canaan, and gets the help and intercession of Pharaoh's near kindred.

Why all this? Was it not a small thing for so great a man to do? Yes; but a request to be buried in Canaan was in some sense putting a reproach upon Egypt. It seemed to say, after all, that the Canaan of degradation and poverty was better than the Egypt of honor and wealth; that the gleanings of such an Ephraim were better than the vintage of such an Abiezer.

This was the language of Jacob's request; and Joseph felt it to be a serious thing to convey such language to the ear of Pharaoh. But he did. Faith again triumphed-and after this manner, is he a witness to us that, we should let the world distinctly learn from us, that with all its advance and promise,. it is nothing to us, while CHRIST'S THING, THOUGH IN WEAKNESS, IS OUR OBJECT."

"And this is the victory that overcometh the world -our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is THE SON OF GOD (1 John 5:4, 5).

Fellowship in Rejection

My heart has perfect repose in the thought of being rejected. I only trust I shall always be able to bear it in meekness; neither in disdain turning from and scorning those who thus act, nor in self-vindication retaliating, but accepting all simply as that path in which we are to have fellowship with Jesus, who was so misunderstood, and whose principles were so little appreciated even by His apostles and brethren. It is so valuable a school to learn in; the one in which the more you love, the less you are loved, and still not to be faint or be weary.

At times my heart is very sick at the aspect of things, such divisions, such jealousies, such evil surmisings; but then I think, thus it was with Jesus. If I am called a teacher of blasphemy, so was He; if I am called a Sabbath-breaker, so was He; if my authority to teach was questioned, so was His, though it was the wisdom of His. If He was neglected by His own people, so are we.

Man Glorified in the Heavens

THE second of St. Luke's letters to his friend Theophilus, does not stiffly and formally take up the inspired narrative, where the first of them had left it; there is rather an easy and graceful intertwining or intervolving of the two: the second, going back a little into the scenes and the seasons which closed the first, giving them the same general character with a few faint distinguishing features. But each of these letters, "the Gospel by Luke," and "the Acts of the Apostles," has of course, as I need not say, its own proper subject.

In the early chapters of the, second of them, that is, of " the Acts of the Apostles," and to which I am now, for a little, addressing myself, we get an account of Jesus as Man glorified in the heavens; as in the early chapters of the first of them we got an account of God manifest in flesh on the earth. I mean, this is characteristic, severally, of each of them. The Person is, surely, one and the same in both; the God-Man.

We learn many things connected with the Son of Man in heaven, from the Evangelists, where that mystery is anticipated now and again. The Lord Himself tells us that He is to be seen there by faith all through this present age, seated at the right hand of power; and that in due time He will come forth from thence in the clouds of heaven. (Matt. 26:64.) He tells us also, that when He has come forth, He will sit on the throne of His glory. (Matt. 25:31.) These are but mere samples of the way in which this great mystery was anticipated. But the Person seen in the Evangelists is God manifested in the flesh, and as such in action on the earth. In these chapters in the Acts, which succeeds the Evangelists, it is, on the other hand, Man glorified by God in heaven, and acting there.

In chapter 1, Jesus of Nazareth, who was God manifest in flesh here, is seen ascending the heavens.

In chapter 2, the promised Spirit is given, and Peter begins his preaching by taking this gift, according to the prophecy of Joel, as his text. And after reciting it, he says, " Ye men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." And he then shows, from the sixteenth and one hundred and tenth Psalms, that this Man thus approved of God on earth, was now raised from the dead and glorified at the right hand of God in heaven.

Thus the mystery is established, the mystery of the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, exalted in the heavens. Then, as the Evangelists had already looked at Jesus as He walked, and ministered, and toiled, and suffered here on earth, so now in his preaching in this and in the following chapters, Peter gives us some of the ways and virtues of this same Jesus now ascended into heaven.

Thus, in this same chapter 2, with Joel still as his text, he tells us, that He is the God mentioned in that prophecy, who has now sent down the Spirit. According to Joel, therefore, it is the God of

Israel who does this great Pentecostal wonder; according to Peter, it is the Man now in heaven that does it.

This is surely a magnificent way in which to begin the story of the virtues and glories of Jesus of Nazareth, now glorified on high at God's right hand; where also Peter declares Him to be seated, till the day come for making His foes His footstool, as the " My Lord," of the hundred and tenth Psalm. And then, on the authority of these things, he calls the whole house of Israel, to own the once crucified Man to be both Lord and Christ. And when a number of his hearers are aroused by this preaching, he publishes to them the virtue of " the name" of this glorified One, that it can secure eternal life and the gift of the Spirit to all sinners who receive it.

Then, in chapter 3, this same Apostle tells us several other great things of Jesus in the heavens-that it was His name, through faith in it, that had just healed the lame Beggar at the gate of the Temple -that He was the Prophet promised by Moses in Deut. 18-that the heavens are now retaining Him, but that He is again to leave them in due season, and to bring times of refreshing and the restitution of all things with Him back to the earth.

Then, in chapter 4, he preaches through this same Jesus, " the resurrection from the dead "-and further proclaims, that He was " the Head of the corner," according to Psal. 118, and the only One set of God for salvation in this guilty world. And toward the close of this chapter, he and his fellow-saints at Jerusalem lay the name of this same Jesus before the Lord God, the Maker of the heaven and the earth, as all their confidence and title to blessing.

Then, in chapter 5, Peter and the other Apostles testify in the face of the Jewish council, that this same blessed One whom they had slain and hanged on a tree, God had exalted with His right hand to be both a Prince and a Savior, everything indeed to Israel, whether for blessing or government.

After these manners, in the course of this preaching, we get a large and varied testimony to the Man in heaven. Well may it follow the ineffably weighty and blessed testimony of the Evangelists to the Son of the Father, God manifest in flesh, on earth. But here, with this fifth chapter, the Apostolic testimony under the given Spirit ends. We pass from it to a vision. For after this hearing about the glorified Man, we are given, for a little moment, a sight of Him. Peter had been preaching Him, Stephen is now to see Him. They are alike witnesses, though in different ways, to the same great mystery, that the Son of Man was in heaven at the right hand of God. Stephen is borne by wicked men outside the city to be stoned, while his face is shining like that of an angel; and his eye is opened, and he looks up to and within an opened heavens, and there sees the glory of God, and Jesus, " the Son of Man," standing at the right hand of God.

Thus is the Man in heaven testified by the eye of Stephen as He had been by the lips of Peter. The Spirit fills the one with an inspired tale about Him, and God opens the eye of the other with a glorious sight of Him. But the object is the same-the glorified Man, the Son of Man in heaven, Jesus of Nazareth at the right hand of the majesty on high-the One, who having been " God manifest in the flesh " here, humbled, serving, crucified, buried, and raised again, was now in His Manhood exalted to the highest place of honor there.

One thing, however, still remains in the revelation of this great mystery. In chapter 9, this glorified Man comes down from heaven, and shows Himself, for a little moment, here on earth. In holy,

peaceful glory, and in the attitude of one that was receiving him to Himself with a blissful and perfect welcome, He had just been seen, as in His due place in heaven, by His suffering saint. But now, in terrible majesty, in the burning brightness of judicial glory, He is seen by the persecutor of His saint, here on earth. He thus appears as One ready and all-powerful to avenge the blood of His slaughtered flock. Mercy indeed shall rejoice over judgment in the present case, and the persecutor shall become a Witness and an Apostle; but the vision tells us, that the Man in heaven waits there, as in other characters, so in this, the Avenger, in due time, of the wrongs done in the earth. This is so, and this is here pledged and foreshadowed. For we know that Jesus has ascended in various characters. He has ascended as to His native place, the glory He had with the Father ere the world was-He has ascended to prepare mansions in the Father's house for the elect-He has ascended as their Forerunner-He has ascended to sit in the God-pitched Tabernacle as our High Priest-He has ascended as the Author and Finisher of faith, and as the Purger of sins-but He has ascended also to take His place as Adonai at the right hand of Jehovah, till He make His foes His footstool. And this last character He must return to earth to fulfill, as now He comes down to the road which lay between Jerusalem and Damascus to give, as it were, a sample of this, and to put the sentence of death in this persecuting Saul of Tarsus.

Spiritual Longings for a Fresh Action of the Spirit

" What is wanted in our day, methinks. if He is to be magnified upon earth ere He comes to fetch us, is a fresh action of the Spirit; it may be a hidden and quiet one, as that which wrought ere He came the first time. But there was in the temple Zacharias; and near it, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Anna, Simeon, &c., so there might be going on now a silent, formative power, preparing for the bright and Morning Star's appearing. Do you judge that in heaven there is no sensational movement toward that hour? Surely it is the present mind of heaven that has acted upon us; the very mind that says, " Surely, I come quickly;" which has led to our saying, "Even so come, Lord Jesus," and led to our looking at what there may be still around ourselves practically inconsistent with that hope.-G-. V. W.

The World's Manhood

THIS is the time of the world's manhood. All its elements are putting on strength and taking their full form. The civil and the ecclesiastical thing is asserting its manhood or full age. Vigor marks the progress of the Church of Rome and of the commercial spirit; governments linking themselves with the one for their support, and the people imbibing and breathing the other for their advancement.

The world is thus stirring itself and playing the man.. But Christ is still the rejected Christ, and faith has to own a weak cause in the presence of an advancing world, and of strengthened apostasies.

Thus it is, I judge, at this moment, and thus will it be. But judgment is to fall on the strong thing in the hour of its pride and vigor, and a glory (still hidden, but trusted and waited for) is to receive, to enshrine, and beautify, and gladden that which now walks on as the despised and feeble companion of a rejected Lord.

All this may be serious to the thoughts of our natural hearts, but it is plain in the judgment of faith. It is the will of the Lord to let these apostasies grow up to manhood strength. The Apocalypse presents them to the eye in that form and condition, just when judgment overtakes them.

The woman, or the ecclesiastical apostasy, is riding, just at the moment of her overthrow; and the beast is holding and managing the whole world, just as he is met in the day of the Lord. The Apocalypse in no wise shows us a weakened or depreciated condition of these great agents of the course of this world; but exhibits them in surpassing strength, and bloom, and honor, just at the end. We are not in the days of the Apocalypse, it is true, but we witness the energies (which play their part there in all this vigor and pride of manhood) getting themselves ready, and preparing to take their appointed place. The heart of the children of men is not aware of the true character of all this. Progress is desirable, as they judge. Man in his social place is advanced; and all his welfare in the human system around, with its securities, and peace, and refinement, and morals, and religion, is served. But what is there of God in all this? Were I to adopt the world's boast, and go on with its expectations, I should be strengthening my securities; but I should, with that, be losing my companionship with the heart and mind of Christ, which is our only true dignity this side the manifested glory of the kingdom. God gives all spiritual blessings now, peace and joy and liberty, with promise upon promise. But He is not regaining the earth or its circumstances for our enjoyment. Judgment must do that. Judgment is to make way for glory in the world and peace on earth.

This tries our hearts; we cannot but feel that it does. All things are not now disposed by Christ, though He is in the place and title of all power and authority. He does not affect so to speak, to have all that the heart or nature values at His present disposal. His present kingdom does not actually reach so far, though in title His authority is over all things. He does not speak of making us happy in circumstances; and it is for us to count the cost of this. It is for us to acquaint ourselves with what He is dispensing, and

Men to ask ourselves, can we value it? And it is faith only that values it. Nature cannot; the heart cannot. -What Jesus now dispenses is exactly what faith, but what faith alone, can understand and appreciate.

May we lay this to heart; and, in the midst of all the alarms and forebodings of this serious, solemn moment in the history of the world, say to our souls, the Lord is gathering out His elect, and leaving the great material around us for judgment. This is the way of His wisdom, and it promises us no security in present things, but will work out, for faith and hope, all their brightest thoughts and expectations. Might we, in the real power of our souls, say with another-

" His wisdom over waketh; His sight is never dim;

He knows the path He taketh, And I will walk with Him."

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