

SAMUEL'S FAREWELL ADDRESS.

– 1 SAM. 12:13-25. – JULY 19. –

Golden Text: – "Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your hearts."

SAMUEL the Prophet stands out on the pages of sacred history a very noble character – very similar in many respects to Moses. He had served the Lord and the people faithfully for a long period, and then, at the urgent request of the people and with God's assent, he had anointed Saul their king. The latter had been received rather half-heartedly, but the battle with the Ammonites and the great victory which the Lord granted to his people on that occasion united their hearts to him who had been the visible leader in that victory, and Samuel perceived that the right time had come for a public coronation of the king, and the formal transfer of allegiance to him as the Lord's representative in the temporal affairs of the nation. Accordingly, a general convocation of the people was called to meet at Gilgal – one of the several prominent places for public gatherings – one of the places at which Samuel was in the habit of holding court when, as a kind of supreme judge, he went at different seasons of the year to various parts of the territory of Israel to hear and to decide causes and differences which the elders of the tribes could not adjudicate satisfactorily.

Upon the assembling of the people, the prophet Samuel opened his address (vss. 1-5) by calling upon God and the people to witness to his own rectitude of character in all of his dealings with them for the many years in which he had served them; to his justice in seeking to decide their various questions righteously; to his honesty, in that he never received even the smallest bribe, nor permitted anything to vitiate his judgment; neither had he been an oppressor of his people, but had always sought their good. With united voice the people concurred in the excellence and purity of his administration – a wonderful tribute, one which would be almost inconceivable in our day, in which we find

that even the best and noblest officials are sure to have enemies, traducers, backbiters, slanderers. We are not to suppose that Samuel was merely eulogizing his own administration, but are, rather, to attribute to such a noble character a nobler object. He wished to make a lasting impression with this address and this transfer of authority to King Saul; and, to make his words more impressive and more effective in the interests of his successor and in the interests of the Lord's people, he impressed upon his hearers the fact that his [R3222 : page 216] entire life had been one of devotion, and that they might well understand that his words now were in full accord with all the course of his previous life. They would thus realize that he had their best interests at heart, that he was thoroughly loyal to the Lord, and that his example, as well as his advice, would be beneficial to them. Perhaps, too, he would thus set before the people a standard of what they might look for and hope for from their new king, and before the king a standard of the ideal after which he should pattern his rule.

Next, he called attention to God's faithfulness to them in the centuries past, from the time that he adopted them as his people and made a covenant with them through Moses and became their heavenly King. He recounted to the people the many deliverances which the Lord had wrought for them through various agents whom he had raised up. He would not wish them to think of the recent victory over the Ammonites as being the only one; but he desired that they recognize it, in common with all previous victories, as from the Lord, by whatsoever hand they were effected. He would have them discern that they exercised great ingratitude in forgetting that the Lord had all this time been their King, and in preferring an earthly king to the government he had established. Nevertheless, now that God had granted their request and given them an earthly king, they must not fail to recognize that he was only the representative of their real King, the heavenly One. Otherwise, their condition would be deplorable in every way. They had the king of their choice and God had set him over them: let the matter thus stand, and from this new standpoint they should go on to make the

best of their condition; and to do this, would [R3223 : page 216] be to give close attention to the commandments of the Lord.

Obedience to the Lord would bring blessings both to the people and their king, and disobedience and rebellion or any measure of irreverence toward the Lord and his commandments would bring upon them divine disfavor and injury. Not that the Lord would vindictively render evil for evil, but the hand of the Lord would be against them in the same sense that the current of the river is against the persons who attempt to go contrary to it. Divine justice has its steady flow. It is irrepressible; it opposes anything that comes against it, and favors anything that goes in harmony with it. We can recognize something of this principle in various laws of nature; as, for instance, gravitation. Let us also recognize that the principles of divine government operate in a very similar manner. As fire burns the evil or the good when they come in contact with it, and as the law of gravitation operates in respect to all, whether good or bad, who come into the line of its influence, so the principles of divine justice operate automatically.

The correctness of the foregoing statement may be questioned by some, who may say that in the majority of cases justice does not seem to operate; that those who tempt God are set up, and those who work wickedness and deceit often prosper. We reply that in order to understand our position it must be remembered that God's government has never been established in the world except over the one nation of Israel; and, hence, only in that one nation should we expect to find the laws of retribution operating automatically. The Lord said of Israel, "You only have I known [recognized] of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2.) Again, the Apostle asks, "What advantage hath the Jew?" and, answering, declares, "Much every way; chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." God entered into obligations with Israel that if they, as a people, would obey his laws and keep his statutes, they would be blessed in proportion to their faithfulness and obedience; and if they should fail of obedience, they would be correspondingly punished; that he would permit to come upon them

various chastisements – diseases, etc. – as the natural results of the violations of the principles of his government. But such an arrangement has not been made with other nations at any time in the world's history. With spiritual Israel God's blessings and chastisements are spiritual, and do not extend to temporal affairs. In proportion to their faithfulness they grow spiritually strong and beautiful; and in proportion to their unfaithfulness they grow spiritually weak and receive chastisements and lose divine favor. It is not true with the spiritual Israelite as it was with the natural Israelite, that by obeying the Lord he would be blessed temporally in all his undertakings. On the contrary, to the spiritual Israelite the Lord gives the express declaration and encouragement: "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall [in this life] suffer persecution"; "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you"; "Ye know that it hated me before it hated you"; "Blessed are ye when men shall say all manner of evil against you for my sake: rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven" – in spiritual things, not in temporal matters. – 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Jno. 3:13; John 15:18; Matt. 5:11,12.

When the Millennial Kingdom shall be established, and, in harmony with the petition of our Lord's prayer, God's Kingdom shall come, and his will be done on earth as in heaven – then the laws of righteousness will work automatically again, and "every transgression shall receive its just recompense of reward," and every proper endeavor will bring its meed of blessing and uplifting influence – restitution. The divine **[R3223 : page 217]** regulations operating toward fleshly Israel in the days of Samuel differ from those to operate toward the whole world in the Millennial age, in that the latter will have a greater prophet than Moses, a greater priest than Aaron, a greater king than Saul. The Lord's Anointed will include all the graces, powers and qualities represented in these types, but on a perfect scale and backed by divine wisdom, justice, love and power, and will put down all insubordination and permanently establish righteousness upon a proper basis throughout the world, eventually destroying all who will not come into accord with its principles.

Samuel proceeded to do a miracle before the people – to cause a thunder shower in the middle of harvest. In Palestine they have the early and the latter rains. The spring rains usually end in April, and the fall rains begin in October or November. A writer on the subject says, "In ordinary seasons, from the cessation of the showers in spring until their commencement in October or November, rain never falls, and the sky is usually serene." The wheat harvest which the prophet pointed out to them as just in order, must have been the first of June and, hence, nothing could have been further from the expectation of the people than a thunder-shower at that time. The bringing of it at the prophet's announcement, was to remind the people how completely their affairs and interests were in divine power. They were to discern that the recent victory need not have been theirs except as the Lord had been pleased to favor them and grant them the victory; and that simply by bringing unfavorable showers upon their harvest the entire fruitage of their labors of many months might be quickly spoiled and they be reduced to starvation, and in that way become more thoroughly subdued than by any foreign invasion. The prophet calls their attention to the wickedness of their course in the rejection of God as their King, and to this power of God, which could easily be exercised did he wish to requite them according to their dealings with him.

The people saw the point. They discerned that if it were to rain a few days they would lose their all; they recognized that they were wholly in the power of God, and entreated Samuel to pray for them, confessing not only the wrongs they had done in seeking a king, but also their sins; "We have added unto our sins."

As the Lord's mouthpiece, the prophet assured the people that they need not fear God's taking vengeance upon them, notwithstanding their wrong course. On the contrary, they should more fully than ever determine to turn to the Lord whole-heartedly, and let their mistake and the trials and difficulties that would come to them as a result of it prove a blessing to them in drawing their hearts nearer and nearer to the Lord, their true King, who never sought anything but their highest welfare.

So it should be with us. If at any time we find that we have taken a wrong course which is irretrievable, we may expect it to bring the disappointments as the Lord foretold; but he may permit it to bring, as well, some blessings in the way of contrition of heart, and humility toward the Lord, and greater zeal, watchfulness and faithfulness for the future. Thus, even some of the blunders of life may become stepping-stones to higher planes of grace and truth.

The sentiment of verse 22 is very beautiful, and, doubtless, was very encouraging to the Israelites in assuring them of God's continued love and favor toward them because of his having adopted them as his people. Applying this verse to spiritual Israel, we may take great comfort from it, too. If it was a favor to natural Israel to be adopted as the Lord's peculiar people, as the house of servants, how much greater is the blessing to spiritual Israel, adopted of the Lord as the house of sons under the chief Son, Jesus; "whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end!" (Heb. 3:6.) It is well that the Lord's people be called upon to fear, to reverence, the Lord; but if the Scriptures were entirely made up of commands and reproofs, the Lord's people would all surely have been discouraged long ago. On the contrary, with the reproofs and corrections, the Lord gives us very precious testimonies respecting his love and mercy, his goodness and long-suffering kindness, to encourage us. All the members of the body of Christ laboring against the course of this world and against public opinion and against the weaknesses of their own flesh and against the great adversary Satan, need spiritual encouragement – assurances that the Lord is for them. The Apostle points this out, saying, "If God be for us who can be against us?" – what will all the opposition against us amount to if God be on our side? He again encourages us with precious words, reminding us of the unchangeableness of God and of the fact that he has already done great things for us and is preparing to do still greater things. If while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly, much more shall his favor be with us now that we are adopted into his family and are seeking to walk in his ways as members of the body of Christ.

The grandeur of the Prophet's character shines out in the twenty-third verse again: he seems to have none of the petty animosities which some smaller creatures might have under the circumstances, and was a patriot to the core of his heart, as well as a faithful representative and ambassador of the Lord and mediator of his people. He says, practically: "Nothing that you have done toward me – rejecting me in choosing King [R3224 : page 218] Saul – shall in any manner or degree hinder my love for you and my prayers on your behalf. God forbid that it should! I should consider this a sin against the Lord who has placed me as a kind of representative of him to you, and of you to him; and I certainly would be failing of my duty and privilege did I neglect this important office of mediator. You may rely upon it that I not only will refrain from pleading against you with the Lord, but that I will petition him on your behalf."

The nobility of Samuel's course may well be copied by the Lord's people under various circumstances in life. When those who are near and dear to us flag in their love and devotion, they need all the more our sympathy and our prayers; and, as our dear Master showed us, even our enemies are to be prayed for and have our good wishes – that the Lord would grant them in his providence such opening of understanding, such experiences as in divine wisdom would be for their highest welfare to bring them into full accord with himself, and thus back into harmony with us and all who are in harmony with him. The prophet indicates that, although he was ceasing to be their judge and ruler, he would not cease to be their instructor in the good and right way so long as the Lord's providences might permit him to serve them, and so long as they would accept his aid.

Recurring, however, to the principal point of his instructions, he points out that reverence for the Lord, serving him in truth with all their heart, was not only a proper course, but a course which would bring them the Lord's blessing. And as a help to our flagging zeal, we should continually remind ourselves of the Lord's great blessings to us. As we learn to appreciate the goodness of the Lord, if rightly disposed at all,

the influences will be to strengthen us and to make us more and more loyal to him. Failing to seek with our whole heart the Lord's service after we have become his people and entered into covenant relationship with him, receiving of his favors and blessings in this life, and also, by promise, in the life to come, would mean wickedness which, persevered in, will surely bring destruction. Faithfulness to God should be the keynote of all our desires. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." – Psa. 19:14.

