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STRONG CHARACTERS IN CONTRAST.

– 1 SAMUEL 18:5-16. – AUGUST 16. –

Golden Text: – "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." – Psa. 46:1.

SAUL and David were both men of strong character, but the former neglected the divine word and counsel and undertook the management of his own affairs, while the latter accepted the Lord and his leadings and by faith sought to follow him. The results showed in both cases: Saul came to an ignominious end. David prospered and exhibited a wisdom and strength of character quite beyond his times. We are not to forget in this connection that David's discreetness and obedience to the Lord kept him from the throne of Israel for years – years of trouble, privation and wandering, whereas the following of worldly methods might have led to much greater prosperity so far as outward appearances would be concerned. Nevertheless, we are to remember also that the nation of Israel had been adopted by the Lord as his chosen peculiar people, with whom he would deal, whose course he would supervise, and in respect to whose rulers he would decide. Neither are we to forget the great difference between the Jewish age, with the divine arrangements and regulations of the same, and this Christian or Gospel age, with its different regulations and its law of love, patient endurance and spiritual instead of carnal warfare. Those who consider the course of David and other faithful ones of the Jewish epoch to be patterns for the Church, the body of Christ, show thereby that they have a total misunderstanding of the divine Word on this matter. To their mind David's battles and victories and slaughters are figures illustrative of spiritual battles and victories on the part of the antitypical David, the Beloved, – head and body – the Christ.

Although Saul had already been notified by the Lord through the prophet Samuel that the kingdom should be taken from his family and

given to a neighbor more worthy of the trust than he, more faithful to the Lord, nevertheless he had been given to understand that the kingdom might endure in his hands for a considerable time. We may assume, therefore, that Saul was on the lookout for one to rise to prominence who should ultimately become his successor, – although we have no reason to think that he understood that David had already been anointed to this position, for David's anointing was kept secret.

Saul, although appreciative of David's prowess, was, nevertheless, jealous of him because of the prominence to which his noble course brought him in the eyes of the people. This jealousy was accentuated as he heard the praises of David sung in grander terms than his own were lauded. Jealousy is always an evil quality – no part of the Lord's Spirit, the holy Spirit, but a strong ingredient in the spirit of evil. Hatred, envy, malice, strife, works of the flesh and devil, are all closely related to jealousy, and often spring from it. Saul should have resisted the envious suggestions which came to his mind: he should have allowed his mind to rise above all personalities and to rejoice most sincerely, most heartily, in the praises of his young general. Doubtless it was in part his remembrances of the Lord's declaration that he should be bereft of the kingdom that made him look with jealous eyes upon David from thenceforth.

Jealousy is one of the great foes that confront every Christian. It should be slain on sight as an enemy of God and man and of every good principle; and to the extent that its presence had defiled the heart even for a moment, a cleansing of the spirit of holiness and love should be invoked. Jealousy is not only a cruel monster of itself, but its poisonous fangs are almost certain to inflict pain and trouble upon others, as well as to bring general woe and, ultimately, destruction upon those who harbor it. Jealousy is sin in thought, wickedness in thought, and is very apt to lead speedily to sin and wickedness in action, the probable result being the defilement of men. The mind, if once poisoned with jealousy, can with great difficulty ever be cleansed from it entirely, so rapidly does it bring everything within

its environment to its own color and character. This sin, when it is finished, if it is allowed to grow, if it is not routed, if it is not overcome, bringeth forth death. All of the Lord's followers should be on guard against this sin, and none need it more than those whom God has greatly honored as his mouthpieces or servants in any capacity. Had David and Saul not been in such high positions, jealousy and rivalry and enmity would have been comparatively impossible.

Under the circumstances we are not surprised to read (v. 10) that jealous Saul was troubled with an **[R3231 : page 331]** evil spirit – an evil disposition. Perhaps the language should be understood as meaning that an evil spirit – in the sense of a fallen spirit, a demon – troubled him. We certainly know that as love, patience, joy and peace are elements of the holy Spirit – God's disposition – so a spirit of hatred and jealousy is an evil spirit or disposition "from God," – that is, away from God, to the contrary of God. We may recognize the fact, too, that such an evil spirit as here took possession of Saul was not only a spirit far from God, or anything that he could approve, but we may even assume that, since Saul was God's anointed representative in the throne of Israel, the evil spirit could not have gained control over him without at least divine permission. As holy men of old were moved by the holy Spirit to speak and write matters of divine inditement, so men have been moved and are sometimes moved today by evil spirits to speak and to write perverse things. This is the thought contained in the word "prophesied" in this verse. Saul spoke unwise things, improper things, spoke foolishly while he had his javelin in his hand. The spirit **[R3232 : page 331]** of evil was upon him, leading him to make a motion with his javelin as though he would do violence to his faithful and humble young general who, as a friend and companion, played for him upon the harp with a view to dispelling his melancholy. The word "cast" (v. 11) is a stronger one than is borne out by the original, which seems simply to signify a motion – although subsequently he did actually hurl the weapon. – 1 Sam. 19:10.

David seems to have been quite intrepid, fearless, and again and again exposed himself to Saul's power when the latter was under the influence of his melancholia. There is no mention of David's fear, for although he felt it to be propriety and duty to escape as he did, he seems to have had continually the memory of God's power for his preservation, and the fact that God had already anointed him to be the king in due time. Such faith and courage points a good lesson to all the members of the antitypical David. Nothing shall by any means hurt us. Things may interfere with our fleshly interests or comfort or course of affairs; but when we remember that we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, that it is as New Creatures that the Lord has promised us the Kingdom in his due time, we can realize that no outside influence can interfere with our real interests, our spiritual interests, nor hinder our attaining to the glories of the Kingdom which the Lord has promised to his faithful ones. Only our loss of confidence in the Lord and our unfaithfulness to him could separate us from his love and his promises.

Saul's jealousy of David was supported by his fear of him. Doubtless he wondered often that the fearless youth who attacked the lion should spare himself – even when he, Saul, had manifested openly his hatred and opposition toward him. He perceived that the Lord was with David and not with himself. David's presence became distasteful in the palace, and, as he could not be ignored, he was put into the army and various commissions given him in connection with the interests of the kingdom, Saul evidently hoping that through some indiscretion David would give an excuse for a turning of popular sentiment against him – perhaps hoping also that in some of the forays he would be wounded or killed. But the Spirit of the Lord, as the Apostle explains, is the "spirit of a sound mind," and in proportion as David trusted the Lord and was guided by that trust he was enabled to do his part with wisdom, winning the approval of the people and all the more the fear and awe of Saul.

This lesson to some extent illustrates the relationship between the Lord's consecrated people and the world at the present time. The worldly are in power, in influence, and yet they are conscious of the fact that divine favor is no longer with them; that a change of dispensation is about to be determined in the divine program; that the Laodicean stage of the church is to cease to be the Lord's mouthpiece, and to be spewed out; that the faithful little flock – of whom not many are wise or great or noble according to the course of this world – are to inherit the Kingdom with much power and glory. They do not indeed realize that the anointed class is in their midst and mingling with them day by day; nevertheless they feel a jealousy in respect to those who have more of the Lord's Spirit than themselves, and hate that which is purer and higher and better than they themselves possess. At times their jealousy would almost lead to murder; but they fear and hate the David class because of their closer relationship to the Lord, and because of his blessing manifested in their hearts and lives. Our Lord referred to such a condition of things in the end of the Jewish age, which was certainly a type of the end of this age. He said of the religious people of that time: "The darkness hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest its deeds be reprov'd; but he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." Thus, as a separation was made between Saul and David, and between those who loved the darkness and those who loved the light at the Lord's first advent, so a separation is rapidly going on today between those who love the light, the truth, and who are guided by the holy Spirit, and those who are of a different mind or disposition.

Our Golden Text should be borne in mind as a comforting and sustaining power to the Lord's faithful. It is in full harmony with the words of the Apostle in the New Testament, who declares that "all things are working together for good to them who love God, who are the called according to his purpose."

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