

OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD.

– 1 SAM. 26:5-12,21-25. – AUGUST 30. –

Golden Text. – "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you."

THIS lesson concerns the seven years of David's experiences as a fugitive from the envy and hatred of King Saul. The latter, though still the nominal representative of the Lord upon the throne of Israel, had lost the divine blessing and power which, in considerable measure, had been transferred to David after his anointing to be Saul's successor. The lesson brings before our minds in sharp contrast the king, whose better judgment was overcome by evil impulses, and David, the "man after God's own heart," who, although far from perfect, strove successfully for mastery over himself, and overcame promptings of evil under the guidance of principles of righteousness. We are not to think of David as perfect. Neither are we to be blind to his faults and sins, nor to excuse them nor to copy them. David was not one of the "saints" in the New Testament sense. He lived at too early a date to share in the high calling, nor could he follow in the footsteps of Jesus, since the Captain of our salvation and our forerunner in the narrow way had not yet come. David was a man after God's own heart, in the sense that he was full of faith in God and aimed aright. At heart he desired to do the Lord's will, and wherever he failed of this it caused him grief and led him to repentance. He lived before the time of God's revelation of his own character and plan and perfect will concerning his people. All things considered, David's attainments in faith and obedience were quite remarkable, so that although as a whole he was not to be considered as a model or pattern by the Church of the Gospel age, nevertheless many beautiful illustrations of proper faith and obedience may be drawn from his career, and some of them are noted in the lesson before us.

The seven years from the time David fled from the wrath of Saul until Saul died must have seemed to David a peculiarly long period

of trial of faith and patience. His own course had been a noble and true one. He had served his king and his nation most loyally, yet he suffered as a reward. He was for a time an exile in a foreign land, and his father's family was obliged to remove to Moab for protection. It must have seemed peculiar to David that the Lord should permit him, anointed to succeed King Saul, to be thus delayed from coming into his kingdom, and instead to be hunted and persecuted as an outlaw. This, however, was a valuable test of his faith, and doubtless helped to strengthen its roots, and thus to make his character stronger and his trust in the Lord firmer. But besides this, we may readily see that those seven years were valuable to David as a preparation for his kingly office. They made him intimately acquainted with the people and their usual manner of life and general sentiments – acquainted also with the neighboring peoples. Above all, he became intimately acquainted with the Lord, and, we may be sure, learned to trust his providences even where he could not trace them. Several of the Psalms were either written during this period and describe David's experiences on the spot, or written subsequently describing the lessons learned from those experiences. Amongst these Psalms may be mentioned numbers 34, 52, 56, 57, 63.

Spiritual Israelites who have already received the adoption and anointing of the Lord to future service as kings and priests, who shall reign on the earth with our blessed Lord and Head, to bless all the families of the earth, can easily trace valuable lessons in the trying experiences of David at the time of this lesson. The Prince of this world is our enemy, not because we have done evil, but because he realizes that he has but a short time, and because he has a spirit that is opposed to the Lord's Spirit in us. We too, at times, may wonder why the Lord – having anointed us and assured us of the glory, honor and immortality in the Kingdom – permits us to have such trying experiences and such severe conflicts with the world, the flesh and the devil. The reason becomes evident as we learn the way of the Lord more particularly – as we learn that the present "afflictions which are but for a moment [comparatively] are working out for us

[fitting **[R3238 : page 348]** us for] a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." We have need of patience, and that can only be gained by trials. We have need of faith, and that can only be developed by necessities. We have need of experience for our future work, which can be gained only by such experiences, which permit us to be touched with a feeling of the infirmities and difficulties and trials of those about us, to whom we shall be ministers and representatives when we reach the throne. For us, then, as for David, the lesson of present experiences is to resist evil, – and not with evil but with good.

In considering the story of David and other Bible heroes we are impressed with the candor of the narratives – that the evil things of their conduct are told with the same frankness as their good deeds. This is one of the peculiarities of the Bible and one of the internal **[R3239 : page 348]** evidences of its truthfulness. How easy it would have been to have glossed the history of David so as to have avoided everything that would be to his discredit; and how surely this would have been done, especially in the case of a king, had the preparation of the Bible not been under divine supervision. Some, we are sure, incline to the thought that the Bible would have been much better reading had some of the faults of its prominent persons been omitted; we, however, are not sure of this. The story of the trials and failures and repentances of some of these noble characters have been no less blessings than the records of their noble deeds and sentiments. As some of the Lord's people have realized their own weaknesses in the flesh, having at times come short of their ideals in the battle against sin, they have found encouragement in the experiences of others related in the Scriptures – not to delve further into sin but to realize that "there is forgiveness with the Lord that he might be feared." As such have noted the failures of David on various occasions and his repentance, contrition and restoration to the Lord's favor, it has given them courage to similarly repent and to similarly trust in God's mercy and in their own forgiveness, and similarly to be

encouraged to arise from their dejection and sin and start afresh in the battle for righteousness, truth, purity, etc.

Our lesson deals with one of David's experiences when pursued by Saul. The erratic course of King Saul under the control of an evil spirit doubtless led him to deal unjustly with other men, as he did with David, – with some for one cause, with some for another. Such people as incurred Saul's enmity, and those that were forced to become fugitives and to be ranked with outlaws, sought out David and put themselves under his superior control. These numbered at one time 400 and later on 600. (1 Sam. 22:2; 25:13; 27:2.) These men, hindered from engaging in the ordinary pursuits of life by reason of the king's erratic course, moved about from place to place, and, since they must eat, their presence was doubtless an affliction upon the farmers wherever they went. Their foragings may have been carried on in harmony with the Jewish law, which provided that any hungry persons might enter any farm, orchard or vineyard and eat to his satisfaction without molestation.

Doubtless it was because the people of the village of Ziph desired to curry the king's favor, and also because they feared the foragings of so many men, that they sent word to King Saul that David and his company could be found in their vicinity. The king hurriedly gathered a troop of 3,000 and went to the place, probably anxious to capture David and his followers. The latter, however, were not so easily caught; indeed they were much better used to scouting than the regular army would be. They readily ascertained all about the king and his army, while the king knew little or nothing of them.

The story shows how David with one trusty companion went into Saul's camp. King Saul and the whole army were sleeping without tents, clothed in their outer robes, as is frequently the custom in Palestine even yet. The king lay not in a "trench" but in a space or corral formed by the army wagons; and at his head, to distinguish him from the rest of the army, his spear was erected near his head-rest, as

is still the custom among the chiefs of the Bedouins of that country. Secure in the thought that David and his handful of followers would be afraid of the king and his army and would not think of coming nigh them, no provision had been made for pickets or watchmen, so that David and his companion readily found the king, and could have murdered him in his sleep and escaped without detection had they chosen so to do. It was not that David was so obtuse that he could not see the advantage that would come to him that he refrained from killing the king, but because of his respect for God and his loyalty to him. David recognized fully that God was the King of Israel, and that God had *set* Saul in the position he occupied and anointed him as king; and that it was the duty of the people to honor the king as God's representative. (Kings among the Gentiles are not thus divinely *set*.) He did not have so weak a conscience as would have permitted him to reason that as God had anointed him to be Saul's successor he had now providentially put Saul's life in his power. On the contrary he reasoned properly that God was still King and that he had all the power necessary to dethrone Saul and to bring him to the throne in his own way; and that the Almighty needed not the assistance of murder on his part for the accomplishment of his plan. **[R3239 : page 349]**

To make the test still stronger David's companion suggested all this, and proposed to carry it out; so that the entire matter might have been done without David saying a word or lifting a finger. To a weaker mind this would have been an extremely strong temptation – he would have argued with himself that the crime would not be his, – that by merely keeping silent and refusing to interfere the whole matter might be accomplished by another. But David knew that his companion would not act without his consent, either formal or implied. He recognized that the responsibility still would be his, whoever might be the tool in the murder. He decided that he would not meet Saul's envy, malice, hatred and murderous spirit with the same spirit, – returning evil for evil, – but, instead, he would requite his evil and murderous intentions with mercy. This was not merely a

matter of policy, but evidently David never had in his heart any murderous spirit towards Saul, for this was now the second time he had him in his power and might have destroyed him. We are not to suppose that David loved Saul with an affectionate love any more than he would have loved any other person of such a character. He loved him in the sense referred to in our Golden Text – with the kind of love it is proper to feel toward our enemies; – the love of sympathy and compassion which, however it might disapprove the character, etc., of the enemy, would neither do him injury nor encourage others to do so, but would spare his life and be ready in any manner to do him a kindness.

There is a good lesson here for all spiritual Israelites. We are to recognize the Lord's appointments and permissions, not in respect only to earthly governments, but also, and particularly, in respect to those whom God has *set* in the Church. Even though such should become enemies of righteousness, it is not for us to accomplish their destruction. The Lord, who called us to the Kingdom and who has promised to give it to us in his own due time, declares it his will that in the present time we should live peaceably, and to exercise patience, moderation and kindness even toward our enemies – toward those who would destroy us or who are pursuing us with the intention of assassinating our characters, or what not. We are not to render evil for evil, nor railing for railing, nor slander for slander; but contrariwise, are to speak as kindly of our enemies as we can, and to think as generously of them as possible – in no sense of the word either physically or with our tongues or otherwise may we retaliate or manifest their spirit, but return good for evil, mercy and compassion for malice and injury.

After David and his companion had reached a position of safety, and when the proper time had come, they hailed the king and his chief general, and called their attention to the fact that the king's life had been in jeopardy, but had been spared; and as proofs they showed the spear and water bottle and informed the king that these would be

returned to a messenger whom he might send for them. It was not improper that David should let all know the spirit of magnanimity which had controlled his conduct in this matter. The king at once recognized the situation, and had manhood enough to confess it promptly and to apologize for his own contrary course. David's procedure conquered him.

The results of well-doing are not always so apparent as in this case, because some evil-doers have less character and principle than had Saul, – unappreciative, envious and malicious as he was. But even if our rendering of good for evil fail to bring the acknowledgment of the evil-doer it nevertheless is right, and becomes a blessing to us. It is the evil-doer who loses by his failure to be conquered by our kindness. Although Saul evidently repented, David knew better than to trust himself to his power; and there is a lesson in this for us also, viz., that while generous toward our enemies, returning them good for their evil, we should not be too readily convinced of reformation on their part, but should realize, as David did in Saul's case, that he was under control of an evil spirit, and that therefore any acknowledgment of wrong or profession of reformation should be esteemed a passing emotion rather than a change of disposition until reasonable time should be given for a demonstration of a change of heart.

David's answer to Saul, under all the circumstances, was a model of truthfulness and forbearance. He neither affirmed nor denied Saul's guilt, nor did he solicit the king's favor and mercy. On the other hand he declared his confidence in God – that he would deal with every man according to his righteousness and mercy – and showed that it was his respect for God and his standards that spared the king's life. He declared that as he had shown mercy toward the king he was trusting in the Lord to show mercy toward him, and that in the Lord – not in the king – he trusted for compassion and help, to deliver him from all tribulations. To what extent David appreciated the high standard of his own expression we do not know. Being a prophet, he frequently typified the Christ, Head and body. His words are certainly

more appropriate for the Church than they were for him personally. David was still under the Law and must therefore be judged by the Law, which, as the Apostle declares, proves that there is none righteous, no not one. In our day, however, we may be covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, so that "the righteousness of the Law may be fulfilled in us who are walking not [R3240 : page 350] after the flesh but after the Spirit." Our heart intentions for righteousness are acceptable to the Lord under the merits of Christ's sacrifice. Our desires and endeavors to be faithful to him and to his Word are accepted instead of perfect works, and hence we may expect that in due time the Lord will accept us in the Beloved, to the glory of his Kingdom. Again David's sentiments are ours and his principles those which appeal to us when he declares that God would have mercy upon him as he had mercy upon Saul. This is the very essence of our Master's teaching – "If ye forgive not men for trespasses against you neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses" – he who shows no mercy shall obtain no mercy.

As Saul recognized the spirit that was in David as being more righteous than his own, and declared that ultimately David would be prospered greatly, so do the enemies of spiritual Israelites realize the difference between their conduct and that of those who are guided by the Lord's Spirit – although they do not often candidly acknowledge the matter as did Saul. The class represented by Saul is a numerous one. It discerns and acknowledges righteousness but follows unrighteousness: it discerns the good but opposes it with evil. Let us, in respect to faith in God and desire to please him, be like David, whose name signifies Beloved, and who, as already intimated, in many respects was a *type* of the Beloved – Christ, Head and body.

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