

"HATED OF HIS BRETHREN"

– GENESIS 37:5-28. – *APRIL 21.* –

"Where envying and strife are, there are confusion and every evil work." – Jas. 3:16

THE Bible story of Joseph is one of the most interesting known to literature in any age and in any language. The portion which belongs to this lesson might easily be termed a tragedy. It illustrates human nature good and bad, and in its various types and incidents furnishes valuable lessons, prominent among which is the oft-repeated one referred to in the Golden Text – that envy is one of the principal roots of human depravity – selfishness – and that from this root have sprung some of the most injurious influences and experiences known to man – "every evil work." As we study the present lesson let us have this thought in mind, and apply each to himself the moral. If in our fallen condition envy can produce such terrible fruitage, how much on guard against it every true follower of the Lord should be. How each should realize that to permit the growth of even the smallest shoot of this root in his daily life might lead on to most disastrous consequences to him as a New Creature.

Realizing this, each should be on guard for the extermination of this weed from the garden of his own heart. One writer has even said, "There is but one man who can believe himself free from envy, and it is he who has never examined his own heart." Undoubtedly this evil root of selfishness is to be found in every imperfect son and daughter of Adam, whether it is flourishing under favorable conditions or dormant for lack of them, or from the overmastering power of grace. Only the heart that is aflame with love for God supreme and for his neighbor as himself is in a condition so sterile as respects envy that the latter has no opportunity for development. With an abatement of our love for

God and man comes a corresponding increase of favorable influence for the development of this root of envy and its concomitants of anger, hatred, strife and every evil work – yea, murder – all of which the Apostle tells us are works of the flesh and of the devil, and hence to be shunned by all those who now and by and by would have the Master's approval. Whatever may have been the natural tendency of our flesh, the new nature begotten of the holy Spirit of the Lord, the spirit of love, is expected by the Father to dominate and render sterile to envy all whom he recognizes as children of God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

"JOSEPH, THE BELOVED SON"

At the time of our lesson Joseph was about seventeen years old, next to the youngest of Jacob's twelve sons, and his father's favorite. He was the son of the gentle Rachel, the specially loved wife of Jacob. Evidently he partook in large measure of his mother's gentleness as well as of his father's courage and faith, as all of his subsequent history shows. His elder brothers were of coarser type, so that all the circumstances and conditions justified Jacob in having a preference for Joseph, in considering him his specially beloved son. His father procured for him what in the common version is called a coat of many colors, and in the revised version a coat of extremes. It is presumed that the extremes were not of colors but of lengths – that the coat was long and had long sleeves, thus differing from the ordinary coats of the working people and corresponding to the style worn by the aristocratic. It is suggested, however, that the coat may have been of many colors, because upon some of the ancient monuments of Egypt such long coats are pictured as having been made of material of bright colors joined together in a kind of patchwork; thus it is possible that both translations are correct.

In any case the coat was a distinct one, and, in conjunction with Jacob's acknowledged preference for Joseph, it helped to fix the jealousy and bitterness of his brethren, who in it saw the suggestion that in their father's opinion Joseph would eventually be a ruler amongst his brethren – his father's successor as the chief of the household, the tribe. We need not here stop specially to criticize the unwisdom on the part of the father in manifesting so pronounced a favoritism. We can, however, realize that Joseph had such peculiarities as justified favoritism and special love. In this, as well as in many other respects, the Scriptures clearly indicate that Joseph was a type of Jesus. The latter was the heavenly Father's beloved Son, and he similarly was rejected by his brethren, he similarly was sold for silver, he similarly was delivered, we are told, for envy. (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10.) More than this, Joseph typified the entire body of Christ, every member of which is to some extent represented in his experiences – to every member of which our Lord's words apply, "The Father himself loveth you." – John 16:27.

THE VALUE OF DREAMS

Certain dreams which Joseph had and which evidently were in some manner inspired by the Lord, and prophetic, tended to further embitter his brethren, serving to fertilize the root of bitterness and envy which was in their hearts. One of these dreams represented a wheat-field in which were twelve sheaves, one of which arose and stood upright while the others fell before it, as though doing homage. Joseph, without evil thought, apparently, told the dream to his brethren, and they, lacking faith in the Lord and submission to the divine will, were angered by the very suggestion that their younger brother should ever be their superior – "And they hated him the more for his dreams and for his words." The words referred to Joseph's report of misconduct on the part of some of his brethren. Righteousness, justice, seems to have been an integral part of Joseph's natural character, and his

report of his brethren was not a slander but merely what he considered to be proper, that his father should know the manner in which his business was conducted. (V. 2.)

Another of Joseph's dreams enkindled the anger of his brethren, and even drew a protest from his father, as though Joseph's ambitions were the groundwork of his dreams. Nevertheless, Jacob pondered these things in his heart, and doubtless wondered how great his favorite boy might some day be. This second dream pictured the sun, the moon and the stars bowing to one star, and was interpreted to mean that the whole family would some day acknowledge Joseph as their superior. How preposterous this must have seemed to them all, including Joseph. Poor boy! His subsequent [R3971 : page 107] lessons in life doubtless taught him to be more secretive, not to tell every dream and hope, not to cast his pearls to those who could not appreciate them, but who would be angered thereby. How necessary to us all is the lesson of wisdom along the lines of secretiveness. Our Lord illustrates this, saying, "I have many things to tell you, but ye cannot bear them now." There is a time to tell and a time to refrain – we all need to watch and to pray, "Set a guard, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." – Psa. 141:3.

GOD'S WORD SUPERIOR TO DREAMS

With the Scriptural record of inspired dreams before us it would be folly to denounce them and to declare them unworthy of any consideration. We remember the other miraculous dreams that Joseph interpreted, also Jacob's, Peter's, Paul's, etc. On the other hand we need to guard ourselves lest dreams should be given undue importance. We are to remember that there was an appropriate necessity for dreams in the olden times which does not exist at the present time; because the Gospel Church is expected to walk by faith and not by sight – is expected to listen

to the voice behind them saying, "This is the way," rather than to expect a miracle or a dream to indicate the path of righteousness. The path beyond us is shown by the divine Word, and we are to cultivate the ears of our hearts that we may have the proper direction. In harmony with this the Scriptures say, "He that hath a dream let him tell a dream, but he that hath my Word let him speak my Word." (Jer. 23:28.) Here the Lord indicates that a dream might be told if we have nothing better to tell – nothing more direct, nothing more authoritative; but that the Lord's Word, his revelation, his inspired testimony is to be put far above all dreams of our own and of others. If a dream, therefore, corroborates some plain statement of the Word of God it may be used and appreciated in the same sense that we use and appreciate a type – not to teach a doctrine or duty, but to illustrate and call attention to the statements.

"COME, LET US KILL HIM"

Joseph's faithfulness in reporting facts led Jacob to make him a kind of overseer, and it was probably in this capacity that he was again sent to his brethren to Shechem, a three days' journey – to carry to them some home delicacies **[R3972 : page 107]** and to bring word again to Jacob of the general conditions prevailing, the prosperity of the flocks, condition of the pasturage, etc. Not finding his brethren at Shechem Joseph followed directions to Dothan, manifesting in the whole procedure a considerable degree of courage and self-reliance, sleeping outdoors at night as was the custom of the time and braving the dangers of the way. This shows us, too, that Jacob's love for his favorite son did not lead him to spoil him entirely, and that the boy himself was recognized as one who could be trusted in a general way to care for himself. Many parents today are less wise, and fail to cultivate courage, determination, etc., in the children they favor – sometimes shielding them from

difficulties in a manner which proves ultimately very prejudicial to their interests.

The brethren as shepherds were accustomed to keep a sharp look-out for wild beasts likely to injure the flock, and discerned their brother at a distance. Forthwith the circumstances and conditions tended to a rapid germination of their root of envy and bitterness, and in a few moments had sprouted and brought forth in their hearts the spirit of murder. Nine of the ten at once agreed to kill their brother. The only one to object, and he covertly, was Reuben, who knew too well the bitterness of his brethren to venture to oppose them, and as a counter suggestion he urged that they do not murder him but put him into one of the dry cisterns of those parts, intending in his heart to subsequently return and secretly deliver his brother.

In these brethren we see illustrated the heart of the natural man, which might at one moment fight for justice and shortly thereafter violate every principle of justice. Was it not these same men who now, in violation of all brotherly love, were planning their brother's murder, who only a short time before had avenged the dishonor of their sister by slaying the population of a whole village – in what they considered a righteous indignation against sin? The transforming influence of the holy Spirit is necessary to correct these violent extremes of the fallen flesh; hence the Scriptures tell us that those who are begotten again of the holy Spirit alone have the "spirit of a sound mind." (2 Tim. 1:7.) Truly in the natural man pride is an important factor, and often leads to murders and lynchings, ostensibly in the defense of righteousness – really in the gratification of an element of selfishness. It was then similarly pride, one of the roots of selfishness, that led to that wholesale murdering; and it was envy, another root of selfishness, which now led them to attempt to murder their brother.

"STRONG CRYINGS AND TEARS"

Reuben's plea was effective. Joseph was put into a pit and the brethren sat down to eat bread, doubtless consuming some of the very delicacies that Joseph had brought to them from home, while the poor boy's cries and entreaties and appeals rang in their ears. They were stony-hearted, unmerciful, as well as unjust: and indeed the natural heart is usually unmerciful. Mercy is often extended through shame or fear or policy amongst worldly people, but mercy in itself is an element of love which, although it originally belonged to human nature, has very generally been lost, and is principally an evidence amongst those who have been begotten again in heart-likeness to their Lord.

Our lesson does not mention the cries and entreaties and pleadings of the imprisoned Joseph, but another Scripture does when later these same brethren were forced by the famine in Canaan to go to Egypt to buy wheat. Their brother Joseph was governor there, and he, affecting to consider them spies, put them in jail three days. It was while they were there that their minds were more or less awakened to the wrong doings of previous years, and they said one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." Reuben's reply to them was, "Spake I not unto you saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold, also his blood is required." Apparently Reuben departed from that vicinity [R3972 : page 108] after Joseph was imprisoned, intending to return later for his deliverance, but upon his return he found that his brethren had sold him to a company of merchantmen who had taken him as a slave into Egypt.
