

"BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL"

– GENESIS 45:1-15; 50:15-21. –

Golden Text: – "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." – Eph. 4:32.

THE climax of Joseph's story is reached in this lesson. Truly no one can read the simple narrative in the Bible and not be blessed by it. The present lesson dates twenty-two years after Joseph came into Egypt a slave. Seven years of bountiful harvests had passed, and the second year of the famine seven had come. If we are inclined to wonder why in all those twenty-two years Joseph had not communicated with his aged father, remembering especially that he had plenty of opportunity for so doing after he became governor of Egypt, let us remember also how particularly his affairs were guided of the Lord, and that quite possibly in this matter he was acting under divine direction. He evidently was expecting his brethren, knowing that the drouth and consequently the famine extended to Palestine and over a wide range of country. Through trusted servants a watch was evidently kept for the Hebrews, anticipating that the famine would drive them to Egypt for supplies. Thus on the arrival of the ten sons of Jacob Joseph was immediately apprised of the fact. They were arrested and brought before him, treated with suspicion and accused of being spies, and put into prison for three days.

Joseph, the governor, addressed them through an interpreter, that he might the more thoroughly conceal himself, and that they might be more frank in their utterances in his presence. He interviewed them after they had spent three days in prison, and heard their admissions the one to the other that their adversity in this matter was esteemed as a judgment from the Lord on account of their wrong course toward their brother twenty-two years

previous. He noted that they still remembered his cries as they had put him into the pit to die; he perceived that the matter had made a deep impression upon their minds, and that they were now in a different attitude of heart. He kept one of their number as a hostage and gave the others a small amount of food, bidding them return and, as a proof of their story, to bring with them the younger brother whom they had mentioned, assuring them that with this proof of their sincerity they would be privileged to traffic without interruption.

The brethren properly enough associated their experiences in the dungeon with those of Joseph, and evidently took to heart the lesson of their wrong course. Although in a previous lesson we saw that these men with one exception were murderers in their hearts, we will see further in the present lesson a marked change in their characters. This was brought about perhaps partly by their father's grief over the loss of Joseph, and partly, no doubt, by their own remorse in respect to their wrong doing. Thus an evil deed is not always a precursor of further evil, but sometimes becomes the pivotal or turning point of character. What Christian has not had an experience along this line – that his point of failure, demonstrating his weakness in some particular line of character, has really been to him a valuable lesson, making him the stronger in that particular, the better able to stand future trials and temptations from the same quarter. Thus all of our experiences in life rightly received (even life's stumbling-stones) may prove to be stepping-stones to better things.

TEN VERY CHANGED MEN

On arrival at home their experiences were related to their father Jacob, who now also mourned the loss of Simeon, the hostage, but utterly refused to allow Benjamin to go from him. It was here that Reuben, noting his father's sorrow, offered himself and his children as hostages for the safe return of Benjamin. It

was not until the famine pressed them sorely and starvation stared them in the face that Jacob consented to allow Benjamin to go with his brethren to Egypt, upon the assurance of Judah that if anything happened to him he would bear the blame. How evidently these men had learned sympathy from their father during those twenty-two years. Once so indifferent that they brought trouble upon him, they now were willing to pledge their own lives for his comfort. We are to remember that these men were the heads of the tribes of Israel, some of whose children were the most notable in history: for instance Levi was the father of the entire priestly tribe, including Moses and Aaron; Judah was the progenitor of David and Solomon and Jesus our Lord. It was evidently a part of the divine purpose to give these men a great lesson in connection with their father, the famine, etc. – a lesson that not only would be beneficial to themselves but have an influence upon all future time.

Arrived back in Egypt from their father's house, the ten brethren were astonished when they were directed to enter the governor's palace. The money for their previous purchase they had found in their sacks when they emptied them, and this they explained to Joseph's steward, saying that they had brought it back with additional money for the purchase of more wheat. Their trepidation was lest it should be claimed that the money was stolen, the penalty for theft under the Egyptian law being slavery. Joseph's steward gave evidence of having to some extent his master's confidence and some knowledge of his religion, for he answered **[R3981 : page 123]** them kindly, "Peace be unto you: the money returned to you was from the God of your father." He further restored their confidence by bringing Simeon to them at liberty. They washed and prepared for dinner at the governor's house, as they were instructed. What could it all mean?

Farmers, they felt strangely out of place in the palace, and queried why the governor, who had treated them previously as

spies, should now treat them so generously. Their astonishment grew momentarily as they noted the peculiarities of the situation: the seats assigned them were in the order of their birth, and when portions were sent from Joseph's separate table they noted that five portions were sent to Benjamin, as indicative of the governor's favor especially upon him. They knew not that the governor, able to understand their tongue, was listening to know whether or not they still were envious, or how they would receive this manifestation of special favor to the younger brother. They stood the test. They showed that their envy was dead, that they rejoiced in their younger brother's favor.

Yet another step of testing was to be taken: the men were allowed to depart with their supplies, but into one of **[R3981 : page 124]** Benjamin's sacks of wheat upon his beast the steward by direction placed the governor's silver cup, and then, ere the men had gotten far from the city, they were overtaken by the palace guard and accused of dishonorable conduct, rendering evil for good in the theft of the "divining cup" of the governor. They all professed their innocence, and declared that if the cup were to be found not only the one who had it should be a slave but the entire company. The search for the cup began with the eldest and concluded with the youngest, Benjamin, the cup being found in his sack. We can well imagine the dismay upon the brethren; they all returned, although the steward said he wanted only the culprit for his slave. How could they face their father Jacob and tell him of this calamity? Returning to the palace the governor, Joseph, was still there. They prostrated before him, and knowing the futility of protestation as to innocence they spoke of the matter as a calamity and resigned themselves to their fate as bondsmen.

The governor replied, "Not so! we of Egypt are not unjust to take you all for bondsmen for one man's fault. Let the guilty one serve, the rest may go free. Return to your home and your families and take with you your wheat." Then it was that Judah, once hard

hearted in respect to his brother Joseph and his father Jacob, addressed the governor a most pathetic plea, which for its simplicity and directness and pathos stands out preeminently amongst all the records of history. He detailed to the governor the circumstances connected with the bringing of Benjamin, his father's grief in parting with him, his assurance that it would mean the hastening of his death if anything happened to him, the fact that he, Judah, had become surety for his brother, etc.; then he concludes, "Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad as a bondsman to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brethren, for how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me, lest peradventure I shall see the evil that shall come on my father?" – Gen. 44:18-34.

THE SILVER LINING OF THE CLOUD

The final test put upon the brethren by the Lord and by Joseph was met successfully. It was demonstrated that they were changed men, that instead of coldness, indifference and gross brutality, they were tender hearted, sympathetic and willing to suffer one for the other. The time, therefore, had come for the clouds and shadows that had been over them for some time to break away. Joseph, the governor, could refrain himself no longer. He ordered the place cleared of the attendants that he might be alone with his brethren – the matter was too sacred for the eyes of others. The time had come for him to throw off his reserve and reveal himself to them. Alone with them he wept, and his voice shook with emotion as he told them who he was and how their designs against him of twenty-two years before had, under God's providences, been overruled for his good. What wonder that the guilty men trembled now as much or more than ever. What resentment might their brother feel against them? how might he now requite them evil for evil, and send them to the house of bondage or to the dungeon?

But through his tears of joy Joseph spoke graciously to them; and, at first disposed to flee, they gathered to him as he said, "Be not grieved with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God sent me before you to preserve life.... So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God, and he hath made me a life-giver to Pharaoh....Haste ye and go up to my father and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt, come down unto me, tarry not." A more dramatic scene could scarcely be imagined, yet through it all runs the thread of simplicity and honesty, and above all the spirit of love and mercy, which could emanate only from the one great instructor, God, and could be exemplified only by those who have been near to him and received his instructions.

"TENDER HEARTED, FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER"

Had Joseph been a saint of this Gospel age, begotten of the holy Spirit and illuminated thereby through the manifold revelations of the divine purpose and character as we have them in the Bible, his conduct would still be worthy of the very highest type of Christian development. But when we think of the circumstances and conditions under which his character was developed, in a heathen land and with but a small revelation of the divine character and plan, we stand amazed. Do we not properly say to ourselves, while studying this lesson, What manner of persons ought we to be considering our great advantages every way? Would we have proven as noble and generous as Joseph under the same circumstances and conditions? If not, why not, except that we have not made the proper use of the lessons provided us in the school of Christ? And we know that unless we do learn these lessons and develop at heart such a character of mercy and generosity we will not be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light – not be acceptable to the Lord as members of the elect, the Bride class.

When sending them home Joseph kissed his brother Benjamin and tarried with him quite a while, the two weeping upon each other's necks. Then came the turn of the other ten brothers. How would he deal with them? Surely he would not manifest the affection of kissing them after the custom of eastern lands, because surely he could not feel toward them a perfect love and good will. But he did kiss every one of them, and since the matter was neither of constraint nor for effect, it evidenced the fact that his heart was full of generosity and loving kindness. "Blessed are the merciful," they are the kind to whom the heavenly Father will be pleased to extend his mercy and his favor. They are the only ones who will be in a proper attitude to receive the great blessing of the Kingdom – others not having developed this character for mercy will be unfit for the exaltation whatever may be their portion.

"AM I IN THE PLACE OF GOD?"

Our lesson skips over that part of the narrative which relates to the coming of Jacob and his household in wagons sent for them by the governor of Egypt, with the full knowledge and consent of Pharaoh the king, and how they were settled in the land of Goshen and prospered there. By and by the aged Jacob died in the land of Egypt, but was taken for burial back into Palestine. The funeral over, Joseph's **[R3981 : page 125]** brethren were in some trepidation. Joseph's course in rendering so much good in return for so much evil seemed so unnatural that they feared that it was only a temporary matter for their father's sake, and that now since his death they would be entirely out of favor with the governor. They came to Joseph again and, apologizing for the past, asked assurances of his forgiveness, telling him they were the servants of God and that they were quite willing to be Joseph's servants also. Note the noble answer they got: – "Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it to pass as it is this day, to save much

people alive. Now, therefore, fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones," and he comforted them, speaking kindly to them.

Generous Joseph! Not a complaint, not a bitter word, only excuses for their villainy. Since the matter had worked out good why should he think evil of the agencies or agents which God had permitted and used? His expression, "Am I in the place of God?" signifies, Is it for me to judge you or attempt to punish you in any manner? Is it not God alone to whom you have responsibility in this matter? and if you can make the matter right with him it already is right with me, for vengeance belongeth unto the Lord and not to his creatures, all of whom are more or less imperfect in one way or another.

Let us apply this lesson each to himself, not only as respects the brotherhood in the Church of God but also in regard to the dealings with our brethren in the flesh and with our neighbors. What matters it to us whether they meant us evil or meant us good, have we not God's assurance that all things are working together for good to them that love him – to the called ones according to his purpose? And this being the case, why should we have the slightest anger or resentment against the persons or instrumentalities in any way used of the Lord in connection with our affairs. Those who thus trust in the Lord, and they only, are able to properly view and meet the affairs of life, and they alone are able to rejoice in tribulation, in persecution, **[R3982 : page 125]** in suffering for righteousness' sake, because they know, as the Apostle assures us, that all these things are working out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and that present difficulties and trials are not worthy to be compared with the glories that shall be revealed in us by and by – when we with our dear Redeemer shall sit upon the throne of earth for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

"THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION"

If the story of Joseph, his sufferings and exaltation to power as the governor of Egypt next to the king, represents the story of Jesus and all those who follow in his footsteps in the narrow way of self sacrifice and suffering, incidental to their exaltation to power in the Kingdom of God under the whole heavens; and if the preparation and afterward the distribution of the wheat, the bread of Egypt, for the saving of the lives of that whole people represents well the blessings and glorious opportunities that are to come to the world of mankind during the Millennial age through the glorified Redeemer, it does not seem amiss to suppose that Joseph's eleven brethren are somewhat typical also. We are to remember that it was his own that received Jesus, not those who cried, "Crucify him, his blood be upon us and upon our children."

We perceive that in the Lord's providence that nation has passed through severe experiences and ordeals since. We may hope that these are proving beneficial, and that ere long the famine for the Word of the Lord will reach them and cause them to come to the great Governor for the Bread of Life. The Scriptures intimate that this will be the time of "Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), but he will be delivered out of it. The Apostle assures us of the same, saying that God's gifts and callings he will not repent of or alter, and that ultimately the natural Israelite shall obtain mercy through the favor of the spiritual Israelite. (Rom. 11:30,31.) The Prophet (Zech. 12:10) takes up the theme, and tells us of how they shall yet look upon him whom they have pierced, and how they shall mourn as these brethren mourned, and how then the Lord will pour upon them the spirit of prayer and supplication, and upon their manifestation of repentance his forgiveness, and how ultimately their sins and iniquities he will remember no more – that instead he will be very gracious to them and kiss them.

We close this lesson with the Apostle Paul's exhortation of our Golden Text, "Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." The more we each realize our own indebtedness to the Lord for the forgiveness of our sins and for our adoption into his family and for the blessings that come to us as the sons of God, the more should we seek to copy after his glorious character and be copies of our dear Redeemer, the essence of whose character is nothing less than justice to every one – with as much additional of love and mercy as we can possibly attain to. The larger our attainments of this God-like quality the more pleasing we will be in the Father's sight and the better fitted for joint-heirship in the heavenly Kingdom, in the dispensing of the bread of life to all the world of mankind.

He who sees not these things and follows not this course according to the Apostle's word is blind and cannot see afar off – cannot see and appreciate the blessings which the Lord has promised to those who faithfully copy him. Those who do see, find the eyes of their understanding opening more widely day by day to the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love of God which passeth understanding; and to make this progress in joyful appreciation of our benefactor, our Lord assures us means a corresponding growth in benevolence, kindness, gentleness and mercy to those with whom we have to do. While this rule must obtain, especially in the household of faith, it will also extend not only to our own immediate relationship in the flesh, but also to our neighbors and friends – yea to our enemies and to the brute creation. All of these will more and more realize the changing of our characters and dispositions, and it will be to their general blessing as well as to our joy.
