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DESIRE AND CHOOSE, THEN SEEK AND ATTAIN

- / KINGS 3:4-15. - DECEMBER 6. -

Golden Text: – "The reverence of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom." – Prov. 9:10.

KING SOLOMON began his reign with a reverent heart, as evinced by his offering sacrifices at Gibeon. In this he evidenced the faithfulness of our Golden Text, which prepared his heart for the blessings which he subsequently received of the Lord. We note the wide difference between his attitude and that of his two brothers, who had sought the throne of Israel in an ambitious spirit and in a traitorous manner, as described in preceding lessons. So far as the record shows Solomon manifested in this matter a proper respect for the Lord and his Divine appointments. In this he may be considered an illustration of our Lord Jesus and of the Church, which is his Body; even as Absalom's career corresponded to the course of Satan and all those who follow his disobediently ambitious course.

Possessed of reverence for the Lord and acknowledging him before all the people as the real Ruler of Israel, and by sacrifice confessing him as Israel's Ruler, the young king was in just the right attitude of heart to receive a blessing. He slept – he dreamed. Whether the dream was the outworking of his own devotion of heart and the Lord's response to it or whether the Lord, noticing his teachable attitude of mind, gave the dream as a lesson respecting Solomon's proper course, none can say, because the matter is not revealed; but, at all events, the young king had a most beautiful dream, which, in view of later developments, can be considered only as a true reflection of Solomon's attitude of heart.

He dreamed that he was in the presence of the Almighty, who graciously inquired what were his desires. Solomon's answer was a most humble one. It intimates that he realized that it was not of any worthiness or merit of his own that God's favor was thus indicated, that it was merely the continuation of the Divine mercy which for years had blessed his father, King David, "according as he walked before thee in truth and in righteousness and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day." (I Kings 3:6.) How beautiful an adornment is humility! The fact that few possess it should make it all the more estimable to us. It is like salt to our food. It adds a blessing to every other grace and talent we may possess.

"I AM BUT A LITTLE CHILD"

We have nothing to indicate that Solomon ever became very haughty, proud, though he certainly would have been a marvelous man had his great wisdom and honor and wealth not affected in some degree the childlike [R4291 : page 363] simplicity which he expressed to the Lord in this dream, saying, "O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in [how to conduct myself in public or in private before the people]. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give thy servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this thy great people." – Vs. 7-9.

The simplicity of this prayer is beautiful. In it Solomon recognized his own littleness and need of assistance and God's greatness and ability to help. He recognized also that the people were not his, but God's; and that he was not really the king, but

God's servant appointed to judge or rule the people according to Divine standards. He recognized that good might appear evil and evil might appear good to his imperfect judgment; and his prayer, therefore, was for wisdom; not that he might be reputed the wisest man in the world, nor for any other selfish purpose or ambition, but that as God's servant he might faithfully and wisely administer the duties of his office, and honor God and bless his fellow-Israelites. Would that all rulers and judges today might have a similarly humble opinion of themselves and a similarly broad appreciation of the duties and the responsibilities of their office, and a similarly child-like faith in God's ability to guide them, to use them, to bless the work to which he has appointed them! Would that they could recognize that all people are God's people, and that they themselves must render an account to God which will be exacting to the extent of their knowledge and ability.

"THE SPEECH PLEASED JEHOVAH"

We do not wonder that the record shows that the Lord was pleased with his choice – because Solomon asked neither long life, nor riches, nor the lives of his enemies, but something far better – wisdom. Then, just as we might expect, with our present knowledge of the Lord's bounty and mercy and generosity, Jehovah declared to Solomon that his request for wisdom was granted, but that with it he would add riches and honor above those of any other human being of his day; and he promised also that if Solomon would continue in this way he would lengthen his days, give him an increase beyond the limitations of his natural powers.

When Solomon awoke and found that it was but a dream, doubtless there was a measure of disappointment in connection with it, but it brought before his mind, clearly and distinctly, just the condition of heart and mind most pleasing to the Lord. And

be it remembered that for a considerable number of years Solomon maintained his humble attitude of heart and faithfulness to God. He returned to Jerusalem and there, through the agency of the priest, made various additional offerings and sacrifices to the Lord, the flesh of the peace-offerings constituting a feast for his servants, including many of the royal citizens. Thus was his reign reverently and wisely inaugurated and the foundation laid for his personal prosperity and that of the nation, which, as God's representative, he both ruled and served.

LESSONS FROM THIS STORY FOR OUR DAY

The word opportunity signifies "standing at the door." We have seen how great opportunities stood at Solomon's door and how he embraced them. Similarly opportunities stood at the door of his two brothers and they embraced them for sin and treason. Let us note that opportunities for good and for evil come to all of us at some time and it is for us to decide which we will grasp. But before the opportunity, comes the desire. If the desires be impure, an evil opportunity in harmony therewith will be found. If the desires be good, noble, true, loyal, opportunities in harmony with these will come to us. The thought to be impressed upon our minds, therefore, is that the desires of our hearts should be noble in every respect, and that all ignoble desires be studiously and promptly set aside, to the intent that **[R4291 : page 364]** only the good opportunities may come to us. But desire and opportunity are not enough. Many a man has had both and gotten nothing. When the good desires have been cultivated and developed and by and by a noble opportunity stands before us, then comes the responsibility of seizing it – decision. Probably more people make failure of life at this juncture than at any other.

Our counsel to the worldly would be along these lines: That first they should have noble ambitions; that they should resist all

others; that they should be on the lookout for opportunities in harmony with their noblest sentiments and should seize them with all the energy of their being, when they come within their reach, and should never let them go. It is worthy of note, too, that very few are so meanly born or unfavorably environed that they are utterly devoid of noble principles or incompetent of discernment as between these and ignoble ones. True, born in sin and shapen in iniquity and surrounded by others in similar conditions, none can help it if ignoble suggestions come to his mind. But it is within his power to exercise his will to resist the evil suggestion and bid it be gone and to entertain only noble, pure, true sentiments. This is illustrated by the adage which declares that "We cannot help crows flying over our heads, but we can prevent them from building nests in our hair."

The difficulty is that where an affinity exists between the evil suggestions and the fallen nature, the will may not be prompt enough to rid itself of the intrusion. The battle of the will, therefore, is not merely with the crow thoughts that desire to nest with us, but additionally the wrong disposition which desires the crow company. A child's hand was stuck in the narrow mouth of a vase. He called for aid and the father suggested, "Open your hand loosely." "I know," replied the child, "that if I do that, I'll drop my penny." The thought is that to release ourselves from the power of sin requires such an exercise of the will as would enable us to drop the cost of our release, "the pleasures of sin for a season."

THE NEED OF CHRIST WITHIN

Our Lord gave a parable respecting a man possessed of an evil spirit who got rid of it and got his heart swept and garnished – but empty. By and by the evil spirit took with him seven others more wicked than himself and they overpowered him and his last end was worse than the first. A valuable lesson can be drawn

from this. It illustrates that under present adverse conditions we are unable to keep ourselves, and that even if we were relieved from the power of sin, even if we were justified freely from all the sins that are past, we would be unable to keep ourselves – the world, the flesh and the Adversary in manifold forms will surely overpower our good resolutions and desires for purity and uprightness. What we need is an occupant for our hearts – the Divine One. If Christ be enthroned in our hearts, if our wills be turned over to him in full submission, he is able to keep our hearts, to guard our hearts. Respecting such he says, the Father and myself will come in to them and abide with them. Oh, the security this implies! Let us not forget that the will is the doorkeeper of the heart and that the Lord's presence will not remain except as we will to have it, and that if we admit to our hearts evil thoughts, evil surmisings, the Lord will not hear us, will not abide with us, but will proportionately vacate and leave room for more and more of the evil influences to enter into us and to possess us.

Hence the admonition, "Keep your hearts in the love of God." The Evil One and entrenched sins will endeavor to remain in our hearts and fight against our wills. But not so with righteousness and the laws of God. These are easily offended and easily driven out. Hence with the Psalmist we should pray, "Oh, Lord! take not thy holy Spirit from me." Remember also the exhortation of the Apostle, "Grieve not the holy Spirit with which ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

If we know these things, happy are we if we act upon them. Happy are we if we realize the primary necessity for good desires and for the rejection of evil desires. Happy are we if, when the message of God's grace came to us as an opportunity of return to his favor, we promptly embraced and received at his hands justification by faith, through the merit of the precious blood. Happy are we if being thus swept and garnished and delivered

from the power of the Adversary, we promptly recognized our obligation to the Giver of all blessing and sought relationship with him. Happy are we if, learning of his willingness to accept the keys of our hearts, to accept our will, we should give it to him fully, completely, forever! Happy are we if we maintain this same attitude of heart-purity and desire for the Lord's will instead of our own, and if more and more we allow the Spirit of the Lord to fill every nook and corner of our hearts and to drive out, not only sin, but every worldly ambition, that we may be fully and wholly possessed by the Spirit of our Lord, the holy Spirit! Happy are we if we continue to manifest meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, goodness, brotherly kindness, peace, love, so that anything which would mar this heavenly bliss or quench this holy flame or offend our Master or lose us his smile, would be considered as indescribable disaster! Happy are we if the joys of the Lord thus continue in our hearts and rule our lives and make us joyful in our pilgrimage towards the heavenly city and its glories! Happy are we as we find the Spirit of the Lord working out through hands and feet and tongue and every power to glorify the name [R4292 : page 364] of our Redeemer and to bless his children and as many others as possible of the groaning creation!

JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Dear fellow-members of the Royal Priesthood, in a certain sense we already have received the anointing of the Great King, which constitutes us in an embryotic sense the Kings and Priests of the future. We are at the threshold of a great work. We are to be associates with our Lord in the Kingdom, that we may be his assistants in conferring Divine blessings upon all the families of the earth. Our position, therefore, is not so unlike that of Solomon. We, like him, have turned aside from service for a time that we may offer sacrifices to the Lord. Each has a sacrifice to bring, his justified self, his will, his time, his influence, his

talents. Now is the time of our dream. Now is the time when the Lord has appeared to us, revealing himself to the eyes of our understanding through his Word. He invites us to choose. He wishes us to see of what spirit we are. Day by day we are making choice, either wisely or unwisely. And day by day he is taking note of those who make a wise choice, as did Solomon.

Do we ask for long life by seeking chiefly self-preservation? Do we ask for riches by giving the best of our time and talent to their accumulation? Or do we ask for triumphs and trials of an earthly kind over others? If we ask any of these things or all of them, as some seem to do, we are not choosing the better **[R4292 : page 365]** part, and the Lord will sooner or later advise us that our choice is not pleasing to him. Are we day by day seeking at the Lord's hand and through his Word an understanding heart, that we may know his will and obediently follow his instruction? If so, we are choosing wisely, reverently – "The secret of the Lord is with them that reverence him, and he will show them his Covenant."

Our desire to know the secret of the Lord should be two-fold: **(1)** That we may fill the office and service to which he has so graciously called us; and **(2)** that we may be prepared in his providence for the blessing of all with whom he will bring us in contact, not only in the present life, but also in that which is to come. It should be our desire, as it was Solomon's, to realize our own littleness, our own unworthiness of so great an honor; to realize that we have the Divine favor only because of our relationship to the typical David, the Beloved, our Redeemer. We are reminded of our Saviour's words, "Except ye become as little children ye can in no wise enter into the Kingdom of God." Here again is the thought of simplicity and humility and teachableness, and not the thought of littleness of stature or immaturity of judgment. The thought of what we have been called to, in the Lord's providence, in connection with his

Kingdom, should lead us to be very humble in the present time, to learn all the lessons which our heavenly Father would give to those who shall be associated with him in his Kingdom, "To the called according to his purpose."

All of the Lord's people are sheep. All are under the Good Shepherd. But amongst the sheep he has appointed some to measurably represent him and to assist and guide the sheep in right paths. These may get the special blessing from this lesson by applying the suggestions to some extent to their present relationship to the people of God. None of the elders of the Church of Christ should ever be heard saying, "My people!" "My flock!" "My Church!" "My congregation!" Rather in humility he should be feeling himself as a little child needing the Divine wisdom to guide, direct, feed the Lord's people, whose interests are so great, so momentous, and the corresponding need of assistance on the way to the Kingdom.

To all who thus choose, to all whose hearts are firmly fixed unwaveringly upon these principles and desires, the Lord declares his approval and assures them that while now granting them the desires of their hearts in respect to wisdom and knowledge, he will by and by give them still more wisdom and, in addition, riches and honor and length of days – eternal life. If this matter of consecration has been thus far but a dream, let us awaken to realities and permit the good promises of the Lord to awaken in us, not only to will and to do aright the Father's good pleasure, but also to cultivate in word and deed, and the thought and intent of our heart, the good purposes of his will. So doing, we shall shortly enter into the "Joy of our Lord."

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