

HEZEKIAH'S GREAT REFORM

– JUNE 11. – II CHRON. 30. –

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." – 1 Samuel 16:7.

KING HEZEKIAH of Judah has a wonderful record as a man of God, a reformer, a patriot, yet he was the son of a bad father, who in turn was the son of a good father, who in turn was the son of a bad father. The alternation between good and bad for four generations illustrates the fact that, although heredity has much to do with every member of our race, nevertheless, there are counter-balances in nature. We are all members of Adam's family, and as such we are all sharers in the general weakness, mental, moral and physical, which for six thousand years has descended upon us. St. Paul refers to this, saying, "By one man's disobedience sin entered into the world, and death as the result of sin; and thus death passed upon all men, because all are sinners." – Romans 5:12.

The downward or sinful tendency inbred in our very constitution is so strong that none is able fully to overcome it. The best that any of us can do is to set our wills in opposition to our inherited weaknesses and to fight courageously against them. The Apostle assures us that if it were possible for humanity to fully gain such a victory over its fallen self as to bring itself back to perfection, then doubtless God would have provided that way of salvation. But that way being impossible, God provided another method, another way, for our return to him – through the merit of Christ's death, "the Just for the unjust," and through Messiah's assistance. This assistance, in the present time, is confined to those who voluntarily seek it. They receive the blessing of peace and joy in the present life and later glory, honor and immortality with Messiah in his Kingdom.

THOSE WHO WILL DO THE LORD'S WILL IN THE NEXT AGE SHALL NOT DIE

However, many are so weakened, so "lost" through the fall, that they are, figuratively, blind and deaf to their own needs, to God's love and mercy in Christ, and to the Savior's offered assistance. These get little or none of the Redeemer's aid in the present time, yet they are not left out of the Divine provision. With the completion of the election of the saints will come the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom "under the whole heavens." By its power sin will be conquered and the blind and deaf prisoners of sin will be released, including the prisoners that have gone down into the prison-house of death – *sheol, hades*.

Then gracious opportunities for earthly blessings and everlasting life will be afforded to all. Then it shall no longer be a proverb, "The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge." (Jer. 31:29,30.) Then only those who eat the sour grape of sin will die the Second Death; and all the willing and obedient shall be lifted up to perfection and eternal life.

A lesson that all should learn is in respect to the power of the will and the necessity for having a positive or strong will rightly directed – a will to do right. King Hezekiah had a strong will, or heart. The secret of his success lay in the fact that he was not double-minded, but with his whole heart sought to do right – to do the Lord's will.

True, it is better that one should be partly right-willed rather than wholly wrong-willed; but let us settle at once that such a person will, at most, be only a partial success in life. Our little *all* is surely none too much to give to our God, to our Redeemer, to the cause of righteousness. A mistake made by many well-meaning people is the keeping back of a part of their heart for themselves. If we give the Lord nine-tenths of our heart and our will and reserve one-tenth, in the furthest recesses, it will but weaken and blemish our character, our lives our success in Divine service. We will find ourselves making paths for selfishness and sin, from the unconsecrated, farthest corners,

all over the consecrated nine-tenths. Properly, the Lord could not accept such a consecration under his call, "My son, give me thine heart."

HEZEKIAH THE REFORMER

Shortly after his ascension to the throne, King Hezekiah took steps for the reorganization of the worship of Jehovah God. His father had introduced idolatrous worship – erecting altars and groves to the worship of Baal. God's temple was strewn with rubbish. Under the direction of the King, the Levites began a cleansing work. It required eight days to carry out the rubbish from the court, etc. Then the priests, who alone were authorized to enter into the Holy, or temple proper, were directed to cleanse the temple itself.

But as a preliminary work, before the cleansing of the court or the temple began, the King directed that the priests and the Levites sanctify themselves afresh to the Lord and his service. How appropriate! How in harmony with the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who lived at that time and who was the King's counselor – "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord's house!" – Isa. 52:11. **[R4812 : page 140]**

It is an important thought that no one is properly ready to render service to God in any form or work until he himself has come to a sanctified condition of heart in relationship to the Lord.

Applying this feature to reforms of our day, we concede the propriety of ministers of Christ taking a prominent part in respect to all religious reforms. In proportion as such have influence with the people, good may be accomplished. But let us not forget the instruction of St. Peter upon this subject. Comparing the priesthood of Israel with the institutions of the Christian church, St. Peter gives us the thought that the priests of olden times do not find their antitypes in the clergy of today, but in God's saintly or sanctified people, whether in or out of the public ministry. And the antitypical Levites of today

are in general the household of faith. Thus St. Peter says to all of the consecrated Church of Christ, "Ye are a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

The great King commands his consecrated people to purify the temple of God, which is the Church, "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the reverence of the Lord." (2 Cor. 7:1.) In proportion as this is done, a blessed influence will go forth from the temple of God, the true Church, far reaching upon all those who love righteousness and hate iniquity.

HEZEKIAH'S GREAT PASSOVER

The King, although only twenty-five years old at this time, had a broad mind – the result of his whole-hearted consecration of himself to the Lord and the Lord's guidance – possibly through the Prophet Isaiah. Having gotten the temple into readiness, the King issued a general appeal to the people to return to the worship of God, to come up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. Not only did this message go throughout the jurisdiction of his own kingdom of Judah, but it was extended to the ten tribes of the kingdom north, the split-off portion of the same people. Messengers were sent informing all that King Hezekiah had cleansed the temple and had appointed magnificent arrangements for the celebration of the Passover, and invited all who loved God and desired to worship him to come and celebrate the feast.

Throughout the kingdom of Judah the message was well received, but in the northern kingdom, where idolatry had a stronger hold, the invitation was derided by many, pride and politics uniting in slighting the invitation and sneering at it and in denouncing the king as an up-to-date hypocrite, etc.

The Passover feast, nevertheless, was a pronounced success, and so greatly enjoyed by the people that it was prolonged for a second

week – the King giving bountifully from his flocks and herds, the people appreciating and availing themselves of his bounty.

The rejoicing amongst the people was general, many of their brethren from the northern kingdom participating. We read, "So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem."

The whole world today is bent on pleasure. It is sought in various directions, in hunting, fishing, theater-going, money-making, in home, family, etc. – legitimately and illegitimately; but of the many who seek pleasure and joy, but very few find it; even the little found usually leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. The real finding of pleasure is in finding the Lord and coming into proper heart harmony with him. There is no other peace or joy or love so delicious, so soul-satisfying as that which comes from fellowship with the Creator through the Lord Jesus Christ; and this joy, as the Master said, he alone can give, and none can take it away from us. To maintain this joy we must continue to abide in his love – eating the Passover in an antitypical sense – rejoicing that we have been passed over by God's mercy and favor – that we have passed from death unto life – from sin to righteousness – from the world into "the Church which is the Body of Christ."

THE SPIRIT OF A SOUND MIND

Our study records that amongst those who came to the Passover from the northern tribes, some ate the Passover without having performed the purifyings stipulated by the Law. King Hezekiah might without impropriety have made a great ado over this fact. He might have berated the visiting brethren on their ignorance, their stupidity, their saturation with idolatry to the neglect of their God's commandments. He might have ordered them to be driven from the Holy City. But he [R4813 : page 140] did more wisely. He prayed for them, asking Divine mercy for their error. Similarly, in the Church of Christ, we at times find some who but imperfectly comprehend the sanctification of life necessary to a proper participation in the Lord's

"feast of fat things." Let us be wise in our dealing with such; let us not denounce them as hypocrites nor hold up their shortcomings. Let us pray for them and assist them in the more excellent way. Let us remember the words of our text, "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." Let us be less punctilious respecting forms and ceremonies, and more lovingly sympathetic with the expressions of heart of all those who seek to draw nigh unto the Lord.

THE DIVINE BLESSING

The conclusion of the feast was a Divine blessing upon all the people, through the Priests and Levites. So there goes out a Divine blessing from the Lord's sanctified people – from all the consecrated of the household of faith – to the people in general – to their neighbors, their friends and visitors from afar. Let such be our influence amongst men. In this connection let us remember the power of the tongue, of which the Apostle said, "Therewith praise we God, and therewith curse (or injure) we men." Let our tongues and all our powers be used in blessing the people as well as in praising our God.

The King wisely began his reformation at the temple and gave the priests and Levites the first share therein. It was later that the idols of the city of Jerusalem were gathered and hurled into the valley of Kedron, and it was after the fervor of the Passover occasion that the zeal of the people in general rose high, and they went forth all over the land, destroying the idols, the groves of Baal, and every symbol of disloyalty to God.

And so today: Everywhere the light of our day is showing more and more of the meanness, selfishness, corruption – some of it centuries old, and some of it bred of special privilege and opportunity in our day. The call for reform is heard on every hand, although sometimes but feeble. The proper place for reform is, as in Hezekiah's day, with the sanctification of the priests and the Levites themselves.

Let us not forget this; and after having seen to our own heart purification in harmony with God, let us proceed to the cleansing of the Sanctuary. Idols and traditions of men in the form of venerable creeds of the past are defiling the Temple of God. These must be gotten rid [R4813 : page 141] of. The vessels of the Lord's house must be cleansed of all defilements – their human traditions, heathen philosophies and superstitions. We must no longer worship a book and a cross, but must reverence the *teachings* of the Book and the *significance* of the *cross*.

If the Church of Christ could but faithfully perform her responsibility, under the direction of the King, it would mean a great revival of religion. It would mean the sanctifying of the people. It would mean the casting out of the idols of mammon – selfishness, filthy lucre and worldly fame, and a general bowing down of men to the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

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