

MAKING FRIENDS WITH MAMMON

– *APRIL 20.* – *GENESIS 33:1-15.* –

"Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you." – Ephesians 4:32. (R.V.)

THE GREAT TEACHER admonished His followers, "Make unto yourselves friends with the Mammon of unrighteousness." In other words, His followers were not to be selfish and grudging, or to be exactors of the last dollar or shilling. They were to be generous in their dealings, and thereby secure the friendship of those who otherwise might hate them. In other words, the followers of Jesus were to have Heavenly ambitions instead of earthly ones, and they were to be willing to allow others to have the best of the bargain in earthly matters, if thereby they could forward their spiritual interests. This is well exemplified in today's lesson.

GIVING ALL FOR GOD'S FAVOR

In a previous lesson we saw how Jacob willingly, gladly, gave up all of the earthly riches of Abraham and Isaac, and left all those in possession of Esau, claiming only that he should be the heir of the spiritual blessings – the great Promise made to Abraham, confirmed to Isaac and to Jacob himself. That Promise was not in respect to the present, but to the future; it was purely of faith. What cared Esau for a promise of the future? He desired what he got – the earthly inheritance. Nor do we find that after he got possession of the earthly inheritance, he ever gave a thought to the Covenant, which reads, "In thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

But all the while, that Covenant was the one thing before the mind of Jacob. He would not contend with Esau for the earthly blessing, although it was included in the purchase which he had made. He would give Esau all of the earthly blessing, if he might inherit this

great blessing of the future. All of Jacob's course in life was governed by this great Promise. If the Seed of Blessing was to come through him, then he must have children; hence he married and reared a goodly family, regarding them all as identified with himself in the original Promise. His accumulation of wealth, flocks and herds, was along the same line – a desire to become great and influential, in line with that Promise.

Under the Lord's guidance, he had left his Uncle Laban's house, with the flocks and herds and servants which he had gradually accumulated there. Under Divine direction he was going back to the land of his father. Although twenty years had passed since he left home, he felt a timidity respecting his brother Esau, and prayed to the Lord upon the subject, reminding Him of the Promise, in which he trusted.

Then he sent word ahead to his brother that he was coming. Next he prepared a present – a gift of considerable value for those times – two hundred and twenty sheep, two hundred and twenty goats, sixty camels, fifty cattle, thirty asses, under the direction of servants. How large a proportion of his flocks and herds these were we know not, but they did represent long years of toil on Jacob's part. They were earthly things, however – things of the present time – and Jacob valued them as nothing in comparison to the great Promise which he possessed. He could give this goodly portion of earthly Mammon as a present to his brother Esau to purchase his favor, his good will. He was not under obligations to Esau; rather, Esau was indebted to him.

Jacob, the younger by a few minutes, had purchased of his elder twin brother all of the first-born's portion, which included the major share of Isaac's worldly riches. Jacob had left all these in Esau's hands. The latter, naturally enough, might expect that Jacob was now coming to claim his riches – to take possession of the estate.

Esau was ready to fight for it, of course. Even if Jacob had protested that he laid no claim to the estate, Esau would continually

have judged him according to his own standards, and would have mistrusted that at an opportune time Jacob would make an attack. Thus a rivalry between the two families would have been established – a feud. Such a feud would have interfered with Jacob's hopes in connection with the Abrahamic Promise. He must be a co-worker with God in the matter of establishing his seed, or posterity, numerous and influential, and qualified in due time to bless all the families of earth.

THE WISDOM OF JACOB'S COURSE

Jacob not only offered the present to Esau, but insisted upon his accepting it. It would stand as a pledge of good faith between them. It would help to heal any old sores. Esau would be all the more willing to see the prosperity of his brother; for he realized that he had gotten the better of Jacob; first, by getting the patrimony, and secondly, by getting in addition so rich a present.

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Evidently Jacob's course was the wise one. He still had plenty, and God could give him as many more sheep, goats, cattle, camels and asses as He pleased. His chief concern would be the promotion of everything appertaining to that great Abrahamic Promise, in which he delighted, the fulfilment of which lay beyond the present life.

THE LESSON OF GENEROSITY

One lesson which we as Christians may draw from the course of experiences of Jacob is generosity toward the world – toward those who have no interest in the Heavenly Promise. We do not mean to institute a comparison between Jacob and ourselves, in the sense of holding him up as a pattern for Christian conduct. Quite to the contrary, we point out that while Jacob's faith was commendable and may be copied by us, his standing with God was very different from

ours. While he was an heir of that Abrahamic Promise and the Christian Church are also heirs of it, our inheritances are different.

We have already seen that the Abrahamic Promise is to have a double fulfilment. The earthly fulfilment is to come to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all of the faithful; while the higher, the Heavenly fulfilment, is to come to Christ and His spirit-begotten followers – the true Christians of this Gospel Age. Only the spirit-begotten from Pentecost onward have enjoyed the blessed privileges of the School of Christ, or been able to develop the fruits and grace of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, the general principle holds good with the Spiritual Heirs as with the natural heirs of that Promise – that faith in the Promise makes secondary everything else in life, hence, as Jacob was willing to set aside all other ambitions, aims, hopes and loves, wishing merely to see the accomplishment of this Abrahamic Promise and to surrender earthly rights and privileges in its favor, so should we, the Spiritual Heirs – yea, more so. We have much advantage every way. We can understand the Promise better than could they. **[R5206 : page 91]**

We see how God has already begun the preparation for the fulfilment of that Promise in the sending of His Son to redeem our race, and thus to make possible the blessing of all the families of the earth in due time. We see further that Jesus, having redeemed mankind, has been highly exalted, and now in power and great glory is merely waiting for the time to come when His Elect Spiritual Church will be completed. Then the Messianic Kingdom will be established; and then Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the faithful heirs of the earthly part of the inheritance will be awakened from the tomb, to enjoy their share in the grand work of world-blessing which God has promised.

As Jacob forsook his father's house, leaving all with his brother without contention, trusting only to the Heavenly Promise, so must

we Spiritual Israelites forsake all earthly hopes and aims for joint-heirship with Christ in the Heavenly Kingdom. As Jacob was glad to give goodly presents to his brother for the sake of peace and prosperity and to assist in carrying out God's arrangement under this Promise, so should we as Christians be willing to give to our partners in life, our neighbors and friends and brethren, the larger share of earth's good things, if thereby we may forward the interests of the Lord's cause in connection with the Abrahamic Promise, in which we trust.

The world has the things of the present time. They are its prize. Mankind set their hearts upon these earthly things – they know nothing higher. We, on the contrary, appreciate the Heavenly things, esteeming, as the Apostle said, that all the things of earth are unworthy of comparison. We, like St. Paul, esteem the greatest things of an earthly kind but loss and dross that we may win Christ – that we may win a joint-heirship with Jesus in the great blessing of God by becoming members of the Spiritual Seed of Abraham, and participating in the glorious work of this Promise – the blessing of all the families of the earth. – Galatians 3:29.

SET YOUR AFFECTIONS ABOVE

God had certain lessons of faith and obedience for the Ancient Worthies to learn. And how well they learned these! How much faith we see manifested in Abraham's career, and Isaac's and Jacob's, and all along down the line amongst those enumerated by St. Paul in Hebrews 11! How their obedience proved their loyalty as well as their faith!

We are not surprised that those noble characters are to have a goodly place in the work of blessing mankind under Messiah's Kingdom. Their experiences in life were a schooling, and training and preparation for what lies before them during Messiah's Kingdom. If they were faithful to God and trusted Him in the dark, and loyally sacrificed earthly interests, doing His will, how sure we may be that

they will be no less loyal, no less faithful, no less obedient, when as perfect human beings under the favorable conditions of Messiah's Kingdom they shall be entrusted with honorable service and power by the great Messiah!

Who cannot see that if the Ancient Worthies of the House of Servants required testing as to obedience, faith, loyalty, much more the spirit-begotten members of the Christian Church require testing along these same lines! There are two reasons why our testing should be more thorough than theirs. (1) We are members of the House of Sons, while they were members only of the House of Servants. We have not only the spirit of begetting as Son of God, but additionally have much clearer light shining upon the Divine Revelation, making known to us God's will and showing us how His Plan is outworking. (2) Additionally, our testing is for a still higher position of glory and honor – "that we might become partakers of the Divine nature"; that we might be joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom on the Heavenly, or spiritual, plane, still more important than the earthly plane, which the Ancient Worthies will receive. As St. Peter says, "What manner of persons ought we to be" – we who have had such great favors and privileges and enlightenment!

If then Abraham left his father's house – kindred – to be a stranger in a strange land in obedience to the Lord's leading, will the Lord expect less of faith and obedience in His spirit-begotten children of this Gospel Age? Surely not! If Jacob surrendered up all of his rights to his father's property, should not the spirit-begotten children of God be willing to do as much, or more? If Jacob was willing to give liberally of his earthly possessions to secure peace with those who owed him much, ought not we, who have received the Holy Spirit, be willing to give still more generously of this world's Mammon, or riches, to those who love the present world, in order to secure our liberties and privileges, which we prize especially as opportunities to make our calling and election sure to the Heavenly gifts and Heavenly calling in connection with the Divine Plan?

FINALLY OUR GOLDEN TEXT

Our Golden Text seems at first not very closely related to the lesson. Nevertheless there is a relationship. It is this: Whoever cultivates the spirit of generosity and benevolence toward others in the interest of the Lord's Cause will thereby be making character. Generosity in dealing with our enemies, with the world, will gradually make us more generous in all our dealings – in our homes, with our families, and especially in the Lord's family, to which our text refers.

"Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you." We are not to forget that the Church of this Gospel Age is represented as being in the School of Christ, to be taught and prepared for Divine service, glory, honor in association with the great Redeemer during His Messianic Reign. We are not to forget that the lessons of this School are the graces of the Holy Spirit, and to whatever extent we attain these graces, to that extent we shall be prepared for the place in the Kingdom to which God has called us. To whatever extent God's people neglect the cultivation of these fruits of the Spirit, in that same proportion they will be unfit to share in Messiah's Kingdom.

Is not this the very essence of St. Peter's exhortation when he says, "Add to your faith, fortitude; to fortitude, knowledge; to knowledge, patience," etc. "If these things be in you in abounding measure, they shall make you to be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord, and thus an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But he that cannot see these things is blind and cannot see afar off," and looks merely at the things of this present life, and will be unprepared for the graduation examinations prior to the inauguration of the New Dispensation – now at hand. – 2 Peter 1:5-11.

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