

LESSONS LEARNED BY JOSEPH'S BRETHREN

– JUNE 1. – GENESIS 44. –

"Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." – James 5:16. (R.V.)

TODAY'S lesson shows us that Joseph's brethren were not nearly so hard-hearted as at first they appeared to be – when they purposed to kill him, and subsequently left him in the pit to die, and still later sold him into slavery. The doctrine of total depravity, which so many of us were taught in our youth, is again and again disproved, not only in our own characters, but in our experiences with others. He who considers everybody totally depraved approaches his fellows from the wrong standpoint. Looking for depravity, on which he has theorized, he finds it, and not looking for anything good, he misses what good there is.

The Scriptural proposition is the correct one; viz., that all men are depraved, that none is perfect, no, not one; that all have sinned; all have shared in the results of original sin; and all consequently come short of the glory of God, which was exemplified in the perfection of Father Adam. The Scriptural thought is that God can accept to fellowship with Himself only that which is perfect. He can give His favor and eternal life only to those fully in accord with His own perfection. Hence, all men being sinners through the fall, all need a redemption; all need a reconciliation.

The opportunity for such a reconciliation comes during this Gospel Age to a comparatively few, and to these it is under restriction. They must be perfect in heart, in will, in intention, and by faith must accept of Christ's merit as covering all their blemishes. From this standpoint God accepts them as New Creatures, ignoring the unintentional weaknesses of their flesh. Thus, through Christ, the true Church of consecrated believers alone are reckoned and

dealt with as sons of God, have the privileges of sons of God and of fellowship with the Father in prayer, and have the Divine supervision of their interests, which guarantees that all things shall work together [R5233 : page 138] for their highest welfare. But even these will need to be perfected by the power of the First Resurrection before they shall see God, and be fully ushered into all the glorious things that He has in reservation for them.

The world's justification is arranged for along totally different lines. The time for it, according to the Scriptures, will be the coming Age, when Messiah's Kingdom shall bind Satan's influence, roll away the curse, and bring instead blessings to the entire race. God will not deal with the willing and obedient then as He deals with His faithful now. Instead, they will be left under the care of the great Mediator, and be justified, or made actually right, during those thousand years. The willing and obedient, brought back to the original perfection of Adam, and fully instructed by the great Teacher, will be ready, at the close of the Millennium, to be presented to the Father, and to be accepted by Him as sons. But, meantime, all not willing and anxious for reconciliation will perish by the way, in the Second Death.

The point we would here emphasize is that God nowhere declares that man is totally depraved, but He does declare that the slightest degree of imperfection cannot be tolerated by Him. Hence the Divine arrangement, through Jesus, the Redeemer and Restorer, is that all of our lacks, all of our shortcomings, few or many, much or little, will be made up for each of us by the great Redeemer, without whose sacrifice and aid recovery to perfection and acceptableness with the Father will be impossible.

JOSEPH'S BRETHREN TENDER-HEARTED

Our lesson shows that Joseph's experiences, mixed with faith by him, worked out in him a grand character, full of sympathy and wholly obedient to God. But by a different process, Joseph's ten

brethren were exercised by remorse, and became more sympathetic, more brotherly-kind, more loyal to their father Jacob. Rewards of all life's experiences – the bitter and the sweet, our right doings and our wrong doings – are intended, under the Divine supervision, to be corrective and helpful to us. Confidence in God, however, is necessary as a basis for any such blessing. We have seen Joseph's confidence, and today's lesson shows us that his brethren, although of a different character, still recognized the Almighty, had a reverence for Him, and realized that He might be expected to give just recompense for every evil deed.

Our lesson tells us that after the feast which Joseph made and in which Benjamin got five portions, the eleven brethren departed for home, well pleased with their experiences and the favor of the Egyptian ruler. Before their departure, Joseph, desiring to test his brethren as to their sympathy for their father and for their loving interest in their youngest brother, had caused his own silver cup to be placed in the mouth of Benjamin's sack of wheat. After they had gotten fairly started upon their journey homeward to Canaan, Joseph sent after them servants from his house to say, "Why have you been so ungracious to your benefactor? Why have you taken his silver cup? What treacherous men you are!" They protested innocence, and declared that if the cup were found in their possession, they would all willingly become slaves. The search for the cup, according to Joseph's direction, began with the eldest brother and ended with Benjamin's sack. There it was found. In great distress the entire company wended its way back to the palace.

Again Joseph was austere and reproved them, that he might give them the opportunity to show their selfishness and to abandon Benjamin. Again protesting their innocence, they nevertheless declared themselves willing to become Joseph's slaves. But he answered, "God forbid! Only the one who has been guilty – Benjamin – shall be my slave. Return to your families and to your father with food, and continue to enjoy the favors of Egypt."

This proposition he knew would test them. Would they be glad to escape personal servitude, and get back to their own families and leave Benjamin a slave? Had they the same cold heartlessness that they had exhibited in his own case, when they sold him into slavery? Would they similarly disregard their poor old father's interests and happiness?

Then it was that Judah, who had pledged himself to his father that Benjamin should return in safety, made an appeal to Joseph. He narrated the circumstances connected with Benjamin's coming – how the poor old father set his heart upon Benjamin, and how he had pledged himself for the lad's return. He wound up an eloquent plea with the entreaty that he might be retained as the bondman, and that his brother Benjamin might be permitted to go free: "Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad, a bondman 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 see the evil that shall come on my father."

The evidence of a change of heart was satisfactory to Joseph, and is to us all. All who love righteousness rejoice in righteousness, as those who love sin rejoice **[R5233 : page 139]** in it. When we perceive so marked a change in those men, we rejoice not only for their sakes, but also for the general lesson which their experiences furnish. The conviction is borne in upon us that much of the sin, much of the meanness, much of the cruelty of the present time, may be attributed to inherited weaknesses and immature experience. We say to ourselves, "How great a change probably would be effected by a larger, broader, deeper knowledge of ourselves and of each other!"

And do not the daily experiences of life tend to give us the broadening of sympathies and thus character-development? We believe that this is true. Doubtless there are exceptions to every rule, but it is our conviction that there is a sufficiency of the likeness of

God remaining in every member of our race to permit him at times to appreciate the good, the true, the noble, the pure. It is because he is surrounded by sin and selfishness that these Godlike sentiments are so rarely appealed to, or brought into exercise.

It seems reasonable to suppose that if every human being were to have one hundred years of experience under present conditions, and then to be given a fresh start, nearly all of them would profit greatly by the experiences, and live more sane and reasonable lives. Nearly all of them would be more generous, as well as more just. We admit that there are exceptions. We are free to confess that the Divine arrangement which limits human life under present conditions is a very wise one.

Some members of the human family appear to cultivate merely the selfish propensities, and rarely to exercise beneficent sentiments. For such persons to live more than a century would mean to give them that much more opportunity selfishly to enslave their fellow creatures. God, however, has both the Wisdom and the Power to eventually bring home to each member of our race valuable lessons along the lines laid down by the wise man, "Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people." – Proverbs 14:34.

WHEN WILL MEN PROFIT?

But some one will say, Admitting the premise that life's trials and scourgings – providential stripes – teach men the sinfulness of sin and the wisdom of righteousness, admitting that in time all of our race might learn something along the lines of this great lesson, even as did Joseph's brethren, where would be the profit of such instruction, if only the saintly, who walk in the footsteps of Jesus under a covenant of self-sacrifice, are to share in the glorious reward, the Kingdom? How will the remainder of the race profit by their experiences, if death ends all hope? Of what avail can the lessons of life be to those who fail to complete those lessons before

they die, or who fail to become saints – fail to become fit for the Kingdom of God?

The answer is that we all have made a mistake in respect to the teachings of the Bible. The Bible nowhere says that all hope of salvation ends when we fall asleep in death. So far as the Church class is concerned, it is true that death will end their period of probation. But it is not true in respect to the world. The Apostle shows that the Church is a special class, called out from the world and given a trial for life everlasting or death everlasting in advance of humanity in general. These, if faithful, will not only gain everlasting life, but have it upon a higher than human plane. As spirit beings, they will attain to that perfection in the Resurrection.

It is to the Church class that the Apostle indicates that, if they commit wilful sin, death will end all, saying, "If *ye* live after the flesh, *ye* shall die; but if *ye* through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, *ye* shall live." The *ye* in both cases refers to the Church, not to the world. – Romans 8:13.

Again, the Apostle declares, "If we sin wilfully after that we have received a knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation," which would destroy us as adversaries of God. "For it is impossible for those who...were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." – Hebrews 6:4-6.

Both of these Scriptures, however, apply exclusively to the Church, because the Church alone is on trial at the present time. The world's time for trial, or testing, will be in the next Age. The thousand years of Christ's reign will be the great thousand-year Judgment Day of the world. In it will be determined the worthiness or unworthiness for everlasting life of all humanity. All found worthy will eventually be perfected and granted the Divine **[R5234**

: page 139] blessing of everlasting life. All found unworthy in that world's trial Day will be condemned as unworthy of life, sentenced to the Second Death.

The experiences of the present life, good and bad, will have their bearing upon the world's future trial, but will not decide the case for any one. Because of misuse of present opportunities and knowledge, some will enter upon the future life and its judgment disadvantaged proportionately. Those disadvantages will be their stripes, their whippings, their chastisement, for present failures. Others, rightly exercised by the trials and difficulties of life, will be made more gentle, more sympathetic, more just, more loving, by them, as were Joseph's brethren. Thus they will be the better prepared for a goodly entrance upon the testings of the great Judgment Day of the Messianic Kingdom.

And as Joseph, whom they sold into Egyptian slavery, was the judge of his brethren, so The Christ, Jesus and the Church, will be the Judges of the world. As the Apostle says, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" – I Corinthians 6:2.

As Joseph judged not his brethren according to what they had done to him in the past, but according to their attitude of heart at the time, so the future judgment of the world will take note of the condition of men's hearts at the time, rather than take note of their wrong conditions of the previous time. Nevertheless, the principle of justice continually operates: he who sins shall suffer. Joseph's brethren suffered for the wrong doing toward him, and they identified their various tribulations with that great sin of years gone by. So it will be with humanity in general. Every sin, every transgression, will receive a just recompense of reward, not an unjust one – not eternal torment.

The good deeds and the evil deeds of mankind each have an influence upon their mentality and character, and that mentality and character are not lost in the sleep of death. There is to be a

resurrection of all that are in their graves. All shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth, each in his own order. The saintly ones shall come forth to the perfection of life at the beginning of the Age, that they may be the judges of the world. The unsaintly ones shall come forth also, that they may be brought to a knowledge of the Truth. All shall have the opportunity of profiting by their works in the past, by the lessons learned, and by the glorious light of Messiah's Kingdom, which then will be everywhere, and which will scatter all ignorance, superstition and darkness, and light [R5234 : page 140] the way of return to fellowship with God and everlasting life.

Our Golden Text is supposed by some to have reference to physical healing. But by others these words are understood especially to apply to spiritual healing, by far the more important. Of these spiritual healings the Psalmist speaks, saying, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies." (Psalms 103:3,4.) They who hide their sins from themselves and who think to hide them from the Lord greatly err, and will make no progress.

=====