

A FRIEND IN NEED – A FRIEND INDEED

– MAY 9. – 1 SAMUEL 20. –

JONATHAN'S LOVE FOR DAVID – A MODEL OF FRIENDSHIP – ITS TEST – ITS ENDURANCE – ITS BASIS – FRIENDSHIP BEING LOST – SELFISHNESS AN IMPENDING DANGER – "EVERY MAN'S HAND AGAINST HIS NEIGHBOR" – THE HEAVENLY MODEL.

"A friend loveth at all times." – Proverbs 17:17.

HISTORY records noble examples of friendship; but supreme amongst these is the story of our lesson – the friendship, the love, of Jonathan, son of Saul and prospective heir of the throne of Israel, for David, his rival in the hearts of the people and in the Divine Program. The purity and unselfishness of his friendship demonstrates to us a nobility possessed by some in those days, which we might not have suspected and which is quite in conflict with the Evolution theory.

The loving spirit of Jonathan stands out all the more in contrast with the jealous spirit of his father, King Saul. Apparently his first meeting with David was after the latter's victory over Goliath. Instead of thinking of David as a rival, who should be crushed, the noble Jonathan took off his own princely robe and gave it to him, together with his sword and his famous bow.

Rev. Alex. Whyte remarks, "Jonathan was the eldest son of Saul; and he was thus the heir-apparent to the throne of Israel. Handsome and high-mettled, full of nerve and full of heart, Jonathan was the pride of the army and the darling of the common people. His comrades, for his beauty of person and swiftness of foot, were wont to call him The Gazelle. But for his father's great and disastrous transgressions, Jonathan might soon have [R5664 :

page 107] been the second king of Israel, second in succession to Saul, but second to no king that ever sat on a throne in those great qualities of mind, heart and character that give stability to a throne and add lustre to a crown."

Well was it written by one of the ancients, "Life hath no blessing like an earnest friend"; and a poet has written:

"Life offers no joy like a friend;
Fulfilment and prophecy blend
In the throb of a heart with our own –
A heart where we know and are known."

"A FRIEND IN NEED, A FRIEND INDEED"

Jonathan's friendship, love, was not of the effervescent kind. It was the genuine article. He did not love merely in word, but in deed and in truth – not merely when his father favored his friend and when the public acclaimed him and when he would thus have favor with others; but he loved him just the same when the king became the enemy of his friend and sought his life. Indeed, it may be said that no friendship could be surely counted upon until after it has been tried. The friendship which will not endure trial, testing, the friendship which will make no sacrifices is not the kind to be modeled after.

Jonathan had love of the kind the Lord admonishes His followers to have – the love which in honor prefers one another. While other loves have been great, this one doubtless stands preeminent above earthly love, especially because it was founded on a religious basis. It was because David loved the Lord, and sought to be guided by His will as that will was manifest at that time, that he would wait – that he conducted himself with wisdom, as the record declares. And it was because Jonathan discerned this

spirit of wisdom, because he realized David was guided by the spirit of righteousness, that he loved David.

Indeed, we may be sure that in proportion as we understand the Bible and receive the spirit of the Truth, in that same proportion we shall be able to appreciate and to copy and to exemplify the best there is of principle – whether of friendship, or of duty to a monarch, of duty to our family relationship, or of duty toward our God. There are many influences operating toward a spirit of selfishness, avarice, jealousy, while the influences making for true friendship, true love, all the best qualities of heart and head, are from the Lord.

We have already noted in a previous lesson how Jonathan acted as peacemaker between his father the king, and David. Today's lesson brings to our attention another occasion on which Jonathan acted the part of a true friend. David realized that his life was in danger and mentioned his fears to Jonathan. The latter was at a loss to believe that his father would break his word, yet was impressed by David's attitude. The feast of the new moon was at hand; and David was expected to sit at the royal table, King Saul at the head, Prince Jonathan at the right hand, the captain of the host at the left, and David occupying the fourth place, opposite the king. In harmony with an arrangement made between the friends, Jonathan was to ascertain his father's intentions definitely and to communicate these to David.

On the first day of the feast the king said nothing, although Jonathan, to attract attention to the matter and thus to draw out his father, chose a convenient time for taking David's seat. Finally the king asked for the "son of Jesse," as though he hated the very name "David." Jonathan replied that David had gone to keep the feast at Bethlehem by his permission.

The king had apparently been foiled in his intention to kill David at this time and vented his wrath upon his son, whom really

he greatly loved. He addressed him as an unruly son, unworthy of his mother, thus implying that he ignored him as his own son. In his anger he threw a javelin at his son, probably not with the intention of striking him, but merely of venting his ferocious jealousy. Jonathan's speech in return shows that he was thinking less of what he himself was risking for his friend and more in respect to the injustice being done that friend. "So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month; for he was grieved for David, because Saul had done him shame."

It is a beautiful friendship which in stress forgets self and thinks only of the interests of the friend. As though in contrast with all the human loves and friendships, we read of Jesus, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Nevertheless, in the case of Jesus, it meant more than any earthly love or friendship; for "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The Apostle declares that the Lord thus set an example to all Christians, that they should "lay down their lives for the brethren," be ready to die the one for the other. This is the Heavenly love, the Divine friendship, of which the love of Jonathan may be taken as a sample, next to the example of our Lord and the Apostles.

"IS IT NOT BEYOND THEE?"

The next morning David, having returned from his home, was to get Jonathan's judgment respecting the king's sentiments. The agreed-upon signal was that Jonathan with his bow and arrows should go into the field near to a great rock; and in connection with his archery would call out, "Is it not beyond thee? Make haste!" if the message was that David should flee. And so it was done. But the two friends could not think of parting, perhaps forever, without having personal contact. Jonathan went over to the rock behind which David hid. The two embraced, after the manner of the East, kissing each other Goodbye – true lovers, with a manly, noble love.

Here it was that Jonathan indicated his faith in God's providence in respect to David, and asked him to make a covenant with him that whatever should occur he would deal graciously with him and his family, saying, "Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed, forever. And he arose and departed; and Jonathan returned to the city."

Bible history shows us that David never forgot the obligation he thus undertook to be a friend to the family of Saul. The custom of the East at that time was that a new dynasty coming into power should utterly destroy all the males of the dynasty which was being overturned. But this was not so in David's case.

It was on the occasion of Jonathan's death with his father on the field of battle shortly after, in conflict with the Philistines, that David expressed the beautiful words:

"O Jonathan, on thy high places thou wast slain!
I am distressed for thee, my Jonathan, my brother!
Pleasant hast thou been to me exceedingly!
Wonderful was thy love to me, passing the love of women!"

We trust that none can read this story without being influenced favorably toward friendship, to be a truer, a nobler, a more faithful friend than otherwise; but especially should Christians get a blessing from this story of Jonathan's love, leading on as it does to the love of Christ and to the injunction that they should be copies of God's dear Son; and that their friendship should be loyal, true, enduring, especially one for the other, as the Apostle exhorts, "Doing good unto all men as we have opportunity, especially unto the Household of Faith."

