Genesis - Commentaries by Frederick George Patterson

Collected Writings, Zaphnath-Paaneah: Genesis 41 & John 4

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To the Editor of the “Christian’s Friend”

Dear Brother, In Jacob’s blessing of his sons (Gen. 49) we find those familiar and lovely words about Joseph used by the aged patriarch: “Joseph is a fruitful bough, (even) a fruitful bough by a well, (whose) branches run over the wall.” We know now that a “greater than Joseph” was before the prophetic mind of the Spirit in the patriarch when he spake those words, of which I now only cite a part. The whole of the blessing may be seen in reading the chapter. The portion I have quoted will answer my present purpose in calling your attention to it.

If we turn back in the book of Genesis, and glance at the lovely narrative of Joseph (Gen. 37:1) — evidently that of one of the most blameless of men whose histories are recorded in Scripture — we find, in Genesis 41, the moment of his full exaltation over all the land of Egypt before us. At this time he was thirty years of age; he had been shamelessly and heartlessly rejected by his brethren, and sold to his captors, oppressed and afflicted, taken from prison and from judgment; the iron had entered into his soul. In all this, as in the many other details of his life, type of him who was to come. He had just interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh, and had counseled Pharaoh to be warned of God in preparing for the years of the famine that was to come. “And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find (such a one) as this (is), a man in whom the Spirit of God (is)?” (Gen. 41:38). And Pharaoh raises him to be head over all the land. There was none so discreet and wise as he. He would be over his house, and according to his word should all his people be ruled; only in the throne would Pharaoh be greater than he. Power over all flesh is his, and all is given into his hands (Gen. 41:43, 44).

He names him “Zaphnath-panneah,” or the “Revealer of secrets,” as the Coptic, it is said, indicates; and “Savior of the world,” as another authority. Of course I do not go further here than to notice the double significance of this title which Pharaoh gave to Joseph.

In the seven plenteous years — those years of grace — the earth brought forth by handfuls from the ripened fields. The reaper received his wage, and gathered fruit for the life to come, when famine would stalk through the land. Joseph too married a wife in the land of his rejection, and to him were born his two sons — Manasseh, his firstborn, signifying “forgetting”; and Ephraim, the second, bearing the name which means “fruitful.” He forgot his toil, and his father’s house; and he was fruitful of God in the land of his affliction.

When we turn to the gospel of St. John (chapter 4), and read of the opening of the public ministry of the Lord, we find the One in whom the Spirit of God is, the One to whom God gave not “His Spirit by measure” (John 3), going forth, when thirty years of age to Samaria, on His mission of glace. “He left Judah”; He left His own to whom He had come, morally rejected by them. He had come to His own, and His own received Him not. He passes out in the fullness of grace to defiled Samaria, morally now, as actually again, with “power over all flesh,” and all things given into His hand by the Father. There He proves Himself to be the true “Revealer of secrets” — One who told the sinful woman all that ever she did (John 4). He forgets His toil, and the long weary journey of that day through the burning heat, till He sat at noon on the side of the well —the most fruitful bough that ever shadowed it. He forgets His thirst; His hunger too — refreshed by the meat to eat of which the disciples as yet knew nothing. He forgets too His father’s house, and in the land of His affliction He is fruitful. The woman of Samaria is found by Him who came to seek and to save the lost. His word to the disciples in those years of plenty which now were dawning, was: “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” Many of the Samaritans too believed on Him; they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the 1Savior of the world.”

He is the true “Zapnath-paaneah” now as then. Surely we can say, as in 1 John 4:14, “We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son, the Savior of the world.” We have learned how surely He is the “Revealer of secrets,” as did the woman of Samaria, through the window of our souls. The conscience of each can vouch for this. We need no proof or evidence that we have had to do with Christ, and He with us.

I only touch upon those few features of this lovely type. Perhaps it may encourage others to look for the more minute details for themselves. But, dear brother, when we know Christ, is it not a happy task to find some lines of Him portrayed on those who went before, and in whom His grace and Spirit was working? Shall we deem it a less happy task now to trace in those who are Christ’s, the hues of His life and ways, as the Spirit of God has done so blessedly in those who had gone before?

Yours affectionately in His love,

F.G.P.

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Collected Writings, How Did Jacob Prevail Over God?

Q. W. F. W., Rhode Island, U.S.A. How did Jacob prevail over God? (Gen. 32:24-28).

A. By earnest weeping and supplication. God suffered Himself in mercy to be prevailed over, thus showing His acceptance of Jacob’s strong crying and tears, and when the wrestling had reduced Jacob to the sense of powerlessness in himself, he clings to the angel in his weakness,

and God suffers him thus to prevail over Him.

This scene is referred to in Hos. 12:4 — “Yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him.” Jacob’s history remarkably unfolds that of a saint who did not walk with God, yet he was a saint, and valued the promises of God, but sought to enjoy them by human means which were not upright. We need faith for the means as well as for the end which God has in view. He had halted morally for twenty one years, and now the moment came when God brings His controversy to an issue with him. His dividing of the flocks and his present for Esau showed that he had no real faith in God’s care, though he prays earnestly enough at the same time. He was a froward man, and we read, “With the froward thou wilt wrestle” (Psa. 18:26, margin). God meets Jacob alone and wrestles with him to bring him to the sense of weakness and nothingness, but does not prevail. At last he touched the hollow of his thigh, and it was dislocated. Now he is reduced to the extremity of weakness and powerlessness, yet he clings to the Angel conscious of who was there, and with weeping and earnest entreaty he seeks a blessing from Him whose strength is “made perfect in weakness,” and he prevails. He is blessed, and for the name “Jacob,” that is, “Supplanter,” he receives that of “Israel,” that is, a prince with God, who had power with Him and prevailed. God answers now with His blessing, having reduced His servant to the consciousness of entire weakness and inability to do without Him. But Jacob bears the marks of the controversy, and he halts upon his thigh for life.

How often we see this! God’s controversy with the souls of His people slighted, and at last they are brought to a moment when all is gone but God! Then the blessing flows freely, but the mark of the discipline which was needed to reduce the soul to that point is seen for a lifelong after. Yet the day dawns and the sun rises on one who has had a deep and blessed lesson from a faithful God.

How all this puts us in mind of our perfect Lord and Savior! His weeping and supplications — “strong crying and tears” — mark the perfection of One who felt in its verity the place He had undertaken in love, yet He must go through and drink the cup, and be forsaken of God. Yet here was perfection perfected. If it must be so, He will have the cup from no hand but His Father’s. He goes on to the cross, and “all my bones were out of joint” was His cry at that solemn moment, when God was averting His face from His Son when made sin for us; and He bears the marks of His sufferings in glory, and forever!

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