Isaiah - Commentaries by Alfred Henry Burton

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Isaiah 33:23; 1 Samuel 30.

GOD has principles of His own upon which He acts, so also has the world, although of a different sort. In its sphere it is the strong, the powerful, and not infrequently the unscrupulous who carry off the prizes. There the spoils are for the victors, while the weak go to the wall — for such are the maxims of the world. But in the divine region we breathe in another kind of moral atmosphere.

A striking instance of what may be regarded as a divine principle is found in 1 Samuel 30.

After the disaster at Ziklag, King David pursues the Amalekites with six hundred men. Two hundred of them become faint on the march, and abide at the brook Besor. The remainder overtake and defeat the enemy, recovering all the persons and the property. To cite the narrative, “David recovered all... and took all the flocks and the herds which they drave before those other cattle, and said, This is David’s spoil.”

On returning to the brook Besor, where the two hundred men had been directed to remain, we hear the announcement of worldly principles, “Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them ought of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away and depart.” To a certain extent there was a show of justice in this, but it lacked a spirit of generosity. Now let us listen to what David, the man after God’s own heart, has to say to this: “Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came out against us into our hand.” David looks at the spoil, not as that which was theirs by force of arms, but as that which was theirs by gift from God. But further he says — “For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his share is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his share be that tarrieth by the stuff; they shall share alike.” The king laid down a new maxim, and thereby established a precedent which, in point of fact, became henceforth a law in Israel. “And it was so, from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day.” David’s decision was governed by royal grace — and so the lame took the prey.

But I would ask, Was the narrative merely written as history? Far be the thought. The incident is surely included in the “things that happened for ensamples, and were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come.” What are we therefore to draw from the narrative? David may be viewed as the figure of the true David, the Lord Jesus Christ, who went down to the battle against all our foes, and fought the fight alone. As the great Captain of Salvation He bore the whole brunt of the battle — accomplishing redemption by dying the death of the cross. And having won the victory, and having come forth from the tomb, He straightway enters the company of His disciples, and dispenses the Holy Spirit to them. “He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” This was imparting to them His own risen life, and this He had not, could not have done before the cross. The reception of the Holy Spirit, as here referred to, may be connected with the doctrinal statement in Romans 8, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” It is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It is true the disciples had life when the Lord was with them on the earth. Then He had said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” And in resurrection, when He breathed on His disciples, He was giving them this more abundant life.

And the source of this gift of life is the grace of God, as it is written, “Where sin abounded grace did much more abound, that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Believers once were, morally, like the men who were faint and disabled at the brook Besor; or, to use the words of the apostle, they were, before conversion, “without strength.” Nor was it their lot to go down to the battle, yet do they share the spoil with Him who did; for the “law” which now prevails is “the law of the Spirit of life.” And so the lame take the prey.

Although it is not within the scope of this paper to speak of other spoils which Christ has won, and dispenses to His people, it is difficult to refrain from mentioning some of them, such as forgiveness of sins, justification, peace, sonship, acceptance in the Beloved, and a place hereafter with Christ in glory.

It was grace, as we have seen, that governed David in his ruling at Besor. And seasonable this was, seeing that he himself was a striking example of the same principle, for God had lifted him up from obscurity, and placed him on the throne: and so David, in his turn, becomes actuated by the same Spirit of grace.

A great secret in the Book of God, as another has said, is grace. If we are strangers to that, then are we strangers to God Himself. But to know Him in grace is the only way in which to know Him truly and rightly. Such is the way He wishes the children of men to know Him. He has given His only begotten Son, and He it is who went down to the battle, and shares the fruits of His victory with those who, aforetime, were “without strength,” but now are His believing, blood-bought people.

One more word. Is it enough to know we have eternal life, and shall escape eternal judgment? Many there are who seem to think so. Why rest satisfied with one of the fruits of redemption while there are so many more to be enjoyed. Some Christians there are who have the idea that, in some fantastic way, these fruits will fall at their feet. It is not so. These fruits are to be found, but found by searching the Scriptures. There they lie in rich profusion waiting to be gathered. The diligent will find them, for “the hand of the diligent maketh rich.” The one whose decision was “they shall share alike,” is the same one who has said, “I rejoice at Thy word, as one that findeth great spoil.”

May it be ours to be of kindred spirit! W. J. M.