



JONATHAN

(1 SAM. XIII.—XXIII.; 2 SAM. I.)

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JONATHAN

I SAM. XIII.—XXIII; 2 SAM. I.

Jonathan is not a luminary of the first magnitude as is David, but there are in him some very attractive features. If his end is lamentable it is not dishonourable, while his beginning is uncommonly praiseworthy. Nor does his end blot out his beginning. When God has to deal in discipline with His children He is not forgetful of what may have been commendable in their lives previously.

Jonathan first appears in 1 Sam. xiii. smiting the garrison of the Philistines, which was in Geba. In this he was lawfully aggressive, for the Philistines were not only the enemies of Israel, but of God. From the earliest days, even the days of Isaac, they shew their hostility to God's elect. Through the times of Judges and Samuel we see them constantly harassing and worrying God's people, tempting them above all by their idols. Peace with them would have sunk Israel to their level, not raised them to the knowledge of the true and living God. Believers make a sorry mistake when they fancy that by mixing up with the world they will improve it. It will never do to disobey the word which declares, that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and

that whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. No disobedience to such a plain statement can pass with impunity, or without loss to one's soul.

Jonathan's attack and the defeat of the garrison at Geba is the signal of a great battle. The Philistines gather together their formidable hosts—thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore for multitude. What is Israel going to do in the face of this huge army? Hide themselves in caves and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits! They were God's people, but scarcely yet prepared to bring God into their matters, by casting themselves wholly upon Him. Their leader was a selfish and rash man, ready enough to offer a burnt offering with his own hands, which were not by any means those of a priest, or to have the ark brought him as if he pretended to make God his servant instead of crying to Him for help. But such daring presumption only made matters worse. God lends a very ready ear to a petition, but not to an order or demand, and Saul's manners betray something of that. Another cause for dismay, but after all a very secondary one, was the discovery that on the side of Israel there were no weapons, either for the attack or for the defence. We say this was a very secondary cause for the reason that no weapons can avail where God refuses His help.

But it is true that man's extremity is God's opportunity to show His grace and power. He will not give an answer to Saul, but He will hear the words of one who though near to Saul was very different from him who was a stranger to all his life of faith. Nobody, not even his own father, and, perhaps his father least of all, would have understood him if he had let his secret out before the people. What he meant to do was perfect folly in the eyes of unbelieving men; but "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." And, before the cross, we have a demonstration of this great truth in Jonathan. His words to his armour-bearer God hears, "It may be that the Lord will work for us : for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." To his faith he adds, as Peter recommends, virtue or manly courage. His courage came not of presumption, but of dependence on, and confidence in, God. The term "it may be" do not mean that there was a doubt in his mind, but that he was unreservedly subject to the will of God and confident that God, as He was able to, would grant deliverance to His people to the glory of His own great Name. When he says, "that the Lord will work for us . . . and save by many or by few," he is quite in the current of the mind of God, who purposed to do a much greater work by One alone, and that One His own Son, to work

“a soul-salvation” to be soon crowned by “the redemption of our body.” Oh, the wonders of that cross, the glory of that shame, the power of that weakness (2 Cor. xiii. 4)! “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name!”

Here Jonathan's faith fully rises to the height of David's in chap. xvii., and this explains how they got knit together immediately after they knew each other. Like faith, like confidence, in the living God caused free love, mutual love, to flow out of their hearts. This is very fine. So treacherous are our hearts that faith alone might have gendered pride and perhaps jealousy, but faith and love mixed together formed a strong and blessed link. How great the love and how strong and blessed the link we see in chaps. xviii. to xxiii. ! “And it came to pass that when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” It was not a mere matter of sentiment or an impulsive movement of the natural heart: it was a bond in the Lord. At once a covenant intervenes to strengthen the bond, and thereupon Jonathan strips himself of his robe “and gave it to David and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.” Armed with Saul's armour, David says, “I cannot go with these”; but clad with Jonathan's he could go, for they were those of a

kindred soul. Vesture and weapons, Jonathan gives all to David, and this in no common manner of love, for it was putting a humble shepherd on a footing of equality with a king's son.

The love will soon be put to the test and will prove true. "And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David." Will the son obey the father's command? He knew David "in the Lord," that is on the ground of a "most holy faith," and "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," nothing could induce him to stretch out his hand against one who was his bosom friend and the Lord's anointed. He would serve him, cost what may. But murder him!—the very thought were abhorrent. "But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now, therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning," etc. But advice was not enough: he would confront his father's wrath and plead for his friend. This was "great boldness in the faith," so great that it subdued the wicked king. He spake not in "the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," and he was heard—this time at least.

In chap. xx. some ominous change seems to have taken place. Had Jonathan's watchfulness and solicitude relaxed? How was it that he knew nothing of his father's wicked plots against David?

“My father will do nothing, either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so.” Yet it was indeed, and Jonathan was sadly mistaken in thinking that his father would initiate him into his purpose. He who had said before, “Saul my father seeketh to kill thee,” ought not to have been deceived by false appearances. The love in him was still ready to serve and to help. “Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee”; but it needed to be aroused by such words as these, “Truly as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.” And aroused Jonathan’s love now was. He would even risk his life for David, and a new covenant comes in here not only between them personally, as it was at the first, but on behalf of their houses respectively. This held good with David after Jonathan’s death. It was written in his book of remembrance, and in due time he said, “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul that I may shew him kindness *for Jonathan’s sake?*” There was one left, even a son of his bosom friend, a poor cripple, Mephibosheth. And David had him brought to him, and spoke these reassuring words, “Fear not, for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father’s sake, and I will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.” This

was not only kindness, but the very kindness of God.

A last interview takes place between the two friends in the wilderness of Ziph. Jonathan meets David to "strengthen his hand in God." This, again, is very fine. The words by which Jonathan strengthens David are truly admirable, "Fear not, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee, and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth." He puts David first according to God's choice, and is content to be second. And a third covenant intervenes between them. "At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." Yet it was just at this juncture that the two friends parted from each other never to meet again in this life. "David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house." This leaves a painful impression; and when afterwards one reads of Jonathan's mournful death, the sorrowful thought comes to one's mind that on the side of Jonathan the first love must have grown cold.

There was no change in the heart of David. His love flows out as fresh and as full as ever in his touching lamentation, "O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Later on, the Lord so speaks

with regard to the early days of Israel, "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." In the worst days He most graciously remembers the best. A striking thing is, that what the Lord calls here "the love of thine espousals"—the first love, is that shewn by Israel during their sojourn in the wilderness, the "land that was not sown." Did He not hear the murmurs, did He not see His people's rebellion during those forty years? Surely He did. But He saw this also, and it is what had great value in His eyes, *viz.*, that they, spite of all, went after Him. How? By following the cloud which was the symbol of His presence. When it moved they moved, never going before it or stopping behind. Many and grievous were the sins that we read of on that page of their history, but not so many and so grievous as those they became guilty of after their entrance into the promised land. Read God's indictment against them in that second chapter of Jeremiah. Yet in infinite mercy and goodness He would remember the early days, and would have them to remember the same in order that He might bless them accordingly.

And as it has been with Israel, so it is with the church in the present dispensation. She too has left her first love and, by leaving it, has been step by step dragged from the Ephesian state into the

Laodicean. What a downfall, and how truly the Apocalyptic prophecy has been verified ! What is the difference between the love of the early days and that of the last, one can see by comparing Ephesians with Galatians. In Ephesians the Christian is carried right up into the heavenly places, there to enjoy all the spiritual blessings with which he is blest in Christ. The heavenly places are the sphere in which he moves in spirit, and the spiritual blessings those in which he delights. The world has no allurements for him ; he is far above it, not through pride, but because he loves Christ, and Christ is above.

Now look at the Galatians. In writing to them the apostle does not even mention heaven. Their heart was not there. They had put upon their neck a heavy yoke which bent them to the earth. They had become legalists, and were thereby in bondage under the elements of the world, and so worldly-minded. They would not have the cross of Christ to separate them from the world and put them wholly on the side of heaven. The first love which they had known when they received the apostle "as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus," was now a thing of the past. Alas, for them ! alas, for Christians like-minded !

Jonathan's love seems to have grown cold when he lost contact with David, and so it is with the Christian when he neglects personal intercourse with Christ. It cannot be otherwise. Oh, the

blessedness of a life of communion with such a loving Saviour. Keep your heart in contact with Him and it will be warmed up and revived, for He changeth not. Kindle, kindle that heart of yours. Let not the fire of virgin love go out. Hearken to the cry, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh," and hold yourself ready.

P.C.