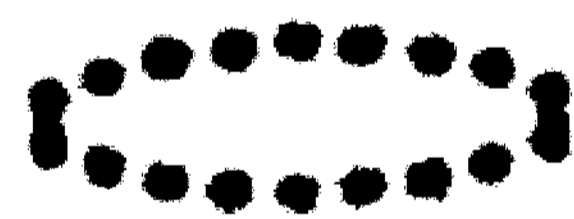


BEAUTY IN SPIRITUAL
YOUTH.

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BEAUTY IN SPIRITUAL YOUTH.

(I SAM. I. 9-28 ; II. 18-21 ; I THESS IV. 13-18 ; 2 THESS. 2. 1-10 ; III. 5.)

It is encouraging to see that all these scriptures we have turned to refer to those who are just beginning. There is no reason whatever why those who are beginning should not be fresh and bright. God would have something very special coming out, I have no doubt, in those that are young ; it is a time that does not last ; growth comes and there is change, but God would have something fresh and bright and attractive in that which is just beginning. It is so we know in natural life with children, and then if you think of creation, the trees and flowers, and all that is connected with the vegetable world, how specially fresh and beautiful they are at the outset ! God reminds us, too, how there is that which is beautiful in the lambs, and how the young should be especially the objects of love.

So in the Book of Samuel you find how God comes in in that way in a day of great failure and difficulty. God had set up the priesthood at Shiloh—the ark was there, and the high priest was there, but although

he knew God he had not gone on in freshness of spirit; he had become old and decrepit. Of course there is that side in regard to our bodies, but God would never have us to become old and decrepit in spirit. There is something wrong if that is the case. We know there was something wrong with Eli in regard to his house and God's judgment came upon him. Eli was a God-fearing man, but he did not rule his house, and so disaster came in, not only upon his house, but upon him and upon God's people; and yet alongside that we can see something growing up and coming to pass that is beautiful and fresh. That is always going on, however dark the day may be, as the Second Epistle to Timothy shews. That was a very dark day when those who had had the greatest light had turned away from the Apostle Paul. "All they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Tim. i. 15), but the apostle writes to Timothy as his child. He could see something growing up for God in Timothy, and he greatly valued it; he knew it would be here after he was taken away, and so we find him watching over Timothy in a special way.

Now we find that the Book of Samuel begins with a woman of prayer. How important prayer is! I have often thought

of it, everything you have that is good, and for God, comes by way of prayer. "There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things" (1 Cor. viii. 6), and then there is the Holy Spirit, and the thought of prayer is specially connected with the Holy Spirit; in fact, all true prayer is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. viii. 26), and then works in the hearts of God's people so that they may be brought into accord with the desires of God. "But he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for saints according to God." (Ver. 27.) So everything comes by way of prayer. I have often thought of it when the Lord was leaving His own here on earth He said to them, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter." (John xiv. 16.) Think of the Lord saying, "I will pray the Father," and as you read on you find the Lord praying, and what a privilege to have the words of that prayer, those wonderful, holy words! How they cover all the history of the church! So we can see how everything has come by way of prayer.

Then we can see, too, in scripture how God takes up the thought of a home; not only a father, but a mother. It was God who conceived the thought of a home; it is one of the things created by God, the idea came from Him. Men may seek to stamp it out, but there it is, it came from God, a father and a mother and children; and in connection with a mother there is the thought of intense and special care. That comes out with Rebekah. You remember how she says in regard to Jacob, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" (Gen. xxvii. 46.) You can see how Rebekah cared for Jacob, she had deep exercise concerning him. You might say, Why did she not care for Esau in that way? Well, I think she had right instincts. I do not believe this scripture is given us just to shew mere human favouritism. Rebekah had right instincts, and she took account of what God had said at the beginning in regard to Jacob, and we can see, too, that Jacob had right instincts. God was working with him. He was different from Esau; "Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man," and

that word "plain" might be translated "homely." "Jacob was a homely man, dwelling in tents." (Gen. xxv. 27.) Jacob availed himself of the care of his mother, and in that way came specially into the good and blessing of her exercise and intercession. How important that is for us! We should not disregard the Lord's people, the assembly, of which Rebekah is a type; especially those that are young in the truth should be like Jacob, seeking the company of those who are helpers, who are praying for them. He was a homely man, dwelling in tents, and so he got the good of that concern that marked Rebekah.

All true prayer comes that way. It is no good just saying the words if we are not afflicted in spirit. A beloved servant of the Lord once said that we can only really pray as we are afflicted. We must feel things; and in Rebekah you get one who felt things, and again in Hannah in the scripture from which we have read. How important it is to keep near the Lord's people, to get the good in that way of their intercession and their watchfulness, and their care, because it is the care of the Holy Spirit coming out in the hearts of those who have received the Holy Spirit. You see that with Ruth in the way she claims Naomi. Naomi was a woman of bitterness

of spirit who had suffered in coming under the discipline of God in a special way, but Ruth discerned that blessing was there in remaining with her, and even when it was suggested to her that she should leave, she said, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go: and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." (Ruth i. 16, 17.) She wanted to be with her; she was set upon the blessing and the place of blessing. Oh, let us ever remember that there is a place of blessing! Jesus is on high, He has gone to heaven, having accomplished redemption, but He has left something here for our good and blessing, and the Holy Spirit has come, so that there is a place of blessing, a place where there is prayer and intercession.

The Book of Samuel begins with a woman of a sorrowful spirit. She is in deep exercise and prayer, and her prayer is answered. We need to take account of God's work. It is quite right that we should be deeply humbled as to our failure, as to what we are as after the flesh, and we should be kept in self-judgment, but then we need to take

account, on the other hand, of God's work, what is of God, what is holy, what is good, what is for ever. I like those words, "for ever." Hannah uses them. How often they come in scripture! It would be a profitable study to follow them up in the Old Testament and see how they come in, "for ever." A lot of things pass away; God's mercy may be connected with them, but when you come to "for ever," it is something that is of Christ, something that is of God, something that is going to last.

So Hannah vows a vow in regard to Samuel that he would be given to the Lord for ever. She did not lose anything by that, she was a great gainer, for God is no man's debtor; if we put the things of God first, the interests of Christ first, God will look after our interests. Eli discerned that; he looked to God that she would be blessed and rewarded, and we find that she has other children, but I have no doubt that she found special joy, a joy that would last eternally, and special satisfaction, in Samuel. Samuel sets forth the work of God, what is of God, and how beautiful and lovely it is! You want to look at it apart from the flesh. That is one feature of the First Epistle of John. It seems a little difficult at first to read it, because you get what is evil and dis-

pleasing to God, and you say, I find that in my own heart ; but then you get what is of God, because the Holy Spirit would teach you one thing at a time. If you look at the work of God it is perfect. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (1 John iii. 9.) You may sometimes have gone astray in taking up that scripture. I remember meeting a man who was trying to think that he could not sin himself, but it does not say that. "He that is born of God"—that is looking at the work of God, and as we are blessed in Christ, God will very soon in our histories give us to view His work and consider it. We need not be afraid of considering the work of God, even in ourselves. There is nothing to boast of in that. Paul could say, "I knew a man in Christ." (2 Cor. xii. 2.) Who was he ? Well, he was Paul, in one sense, but apart from all that he was after the flesh. So Paul says, "I knew a man in Christ . . . of such an one will I glory ; yet of myself I will not glory." You have got to learn to look at the work of God apart from what you are after the flesh. There is nothing to be afraid of there ; it is all of God ; it is perfect and it will last. It is good to realise that. You will come to it

very soon in God's teaching; the Holy Spirit will soon lead you on to consider it.

In the Epistle to the Romans, which is an elementary epistle, the Holy Spirit brings you on to what is of God: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. viii. 1.) How beautiful that is! Nothing to condemn us. It is real, it is not just an idea, not just something to reach to; the Holy Spirit has come, and shed abroad God's love in your heart, and there is something lovely there for God, in spite of all that you are after the flesh. As you realise it, it helps you to judge what you are after the flesh. Paul did; he realised the necessity to be humbled continually on account of what he was as after the flesh, but then when he thought of the work of God, he could say, "I will glory."

So we find a work of God coming in in answer to prayer, and what is presented in Samuel is lovely and fresh. The Lord Jesus has set it forth in Himself in perfection. If you go to Luke's gospel you see in Christ what God has got for us. We often speak of what it is to be blessed in Christ, but when you look in Luke's gospel you will see what God has got for you set forth in absolute perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ. How lovely to see there One

growing up before the Lord, of whom it could be said, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Luke ii. 52.) All was holy there, of course, in Him. He was that One of whom it was said, "That holy thing that shall be born of thee," and God would set forth in Him the blessing that He has got for each one of us. How encouraging it is that He came here as a babe. Psalm xxii. tells us that even at that time he knew God, and was made to hope in Him.

And when we come to Luke's gospel we find Him growing up, and what marks Him at the age of twelve years is subjection; intense, holy, perfect desire towards God, desire to be in the temple, to be about His Father's business, but on the other hand subjection to Joseph and His mother. Then what follows is that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." How beautiful that is, and He has marked out the way for us. Do not think you have to put it off until you grow up. There is the opportunity now for every child that is blessed in Christ to set forth something of Christ in that stage of life, an opportunity which, in a sense, will pass away. So if we read in the Epistle to the Ephesians, there is that exhortation to the children, and what is to mark them is

obedience. How beautiful that is ! Think of it as the obedience of Christ coming out as the result of God's work in our souls !

So that work comes out in Samuel. We find that Hannah is in deep exercise and deep distress of spirit, and she goes on in spite of being misunderstood. How encouraging that is for a day like the present ! She was misunderstood by the very one who ought to have been able to help her, who had the greatest position amongst God's people, but he wrongly accuses her. How beautiful is her answer, how subject she is ; she addressed him as "my lord" ; there is no retaliation on her part. So we find how her prayer is answered, and there is blessing, and one there who can minister to the Lord, and to whom the Lord can make communications, when all else had failed. How encouraging that is ! Do not put off things until you are older. If you are blessed in Him there is opportunity for you now.

Then when we come to the Epistle to the Thessalonians, we get a beautiful setting forth of what is young, and fresh, and just beginning, and you find Paul is marked not only with the spirit of a father, but of a mother and a nurse, as he watches over God's work that it may be preserved. The thought of preservation is very beautiful in scrip-

ture. It is different from salvation ; we need to be saved, and there is a great deal about salvation, but then there is the thought of preservation, and what is preserved is what is good. We know that in this life ; if we have got anything good and worth keeping, we want to preserve it, and so God preserves His work. Think of those words in Psalm xvi., "Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust." Who said that ? The holy One, the One who knew no sin, and yet the dependent Man, could pray to be preserved ; He prayed in regard to going down into death, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades ; neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption." He saw no corruption ; we have to do with corruption in regard to our bodies, because sin is connected with them, but if you think of the work of God, God preserves it from corruption. So we find there is watchfulness over God's work ; no carelessness in the things of God, no such thing as fatalism ; all is worked out in watchfulness and love, and everything comes by way of prayer. So we see Paul's care for the Thessalonians, how he watched over them, and he could look on to the day of glory, when they would come out as his crown.

Now I would like to draw attention to the two great truths he brings before them.

It is very precious to see how these truths are brought out to a company of young believers. You know God always uses any kind of trouble to bring in blessing. Ever remember that. Whatever trouble or sorrow there is, depend upon it God has got blessing in it, even if it comes through our own folly and sin. If we judge ourselves, God will bring blessing out of it. We can see that in David's history, how God brought blessing out of David's failure and sin. God triumphed over it all. David judged himself, and God brought in blessing. So in every sorrow and trial God brings in blessing. That is one result of having to do with Him, you can always look for blessing. God has shewn it in a special way in Christ coming here and going down into death. Then it is set forth in the riddle that Samson put to the Philistines, "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Judg. xiv. 14.) It was in the carcase of the lion that had roared against Samson that he found the honey; and depend upon it, in every sorrow and every distress and every trouble, there is blessing, but we need to look, like Samson did, into the carcase of the lion. Look things in the face, and there is blessing.

So with the Thessalonians, bereavement had come in. We have to face that. There

is something that comes to an end, even with the people of God. We are not only bereaved of those related by ties of nature, but of the Lord's people, and God means us to feel it. The Ephesians felt it, you remember, when Paul told them they should see his face no more : "Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." (Acts xx. 38.) They would see him again in a new way, but there was something coming to an end, and we are meant to feel it. There were those who had fallen asleep at Thessalonica, and Paul takes occasion to bring out this truth. Does he say, "Do not sorrow" ? No, we are meant to feel things. If we do not feel things we shall never get the blessing, If we harden ourselves against one thing, God will bring in something stronger. He means us to feel things. Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus.

But we are not to sorrow as those who have no hope, and so Paul brings before them this beautiful picture as to the dead in Christ ; they will have the first place. How like God that is ! "The dead in Christ shall rise first." They had begun to think that if they died before the coming of the Lord they might be shut out from the blessing, but no, "the dead in Christ shall rise first ; then we which are alive and remain shall

be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." So he gives us this wonderful picture, the Lord Himself descending from heaven, coming down in that way to meet His own, and then His own being caught up to meet Him. What a lovely picture it is! We are meant to learn something in it. We are meant to learn this in it, I have no doubt, that the place that Christ has is for us. Mr. Darby once said that he would give the greatest amount of truth that was possible in three words. Those three words were, "Christ's place ours." So it comes out in what Paul brings before the Thessalonians, "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord," taken away before the time of distress comes upon the earth, and "caught up together," no one left out, no sects and no divisions there, but caught up to be for ever with the Lord.

Then when we come to Ephesians, which was written to those who were fully grown spiritually, we find that Paul brings this truth out as all brought to pass, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love wherewith he loved us, (we too being dead in offences) has quickened us with the Christ, (ye are saved by grace,) and has raised us up together, and has made us sit

down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. ii. 4, 5.) The work is looked at as accomplished, but here Paul takes occasion by the sorrows that had come in to bring out this wonderful thought, that Christ’s place is ours, and our place is on high, to be for ever with the Lord.

But now another difficulty had come in when the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written. There always will be difficulties arising, but do not be afraid of them. If we look back, we who have had any experience at all, can be very thankful for the difficulties. There has been sorrow and failure, and we have had to judge ourselves, but where should we have been without the difficulties that have come in amongst God’s people? There has been some blessing in every trouble that has come in amongst God’s people. So the Thessalonians were being troubled; there were those who were impersonating the Apostle Paul, and trying to make out that the day of Christ had begun. There is that kind of thing going on now, people trying to make out that the millennium has come. I would say to such, It is a poor kind of millennium if this is it. But then it is all false, and the apostle shews how it is false: “For that day shall not come except there come a falling away first,

and that man of sin be revealed.” Christ has come in the Father’s name, and He could say, “another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.” (John v. 43.) God, in His wisdom, is going to allow sin to head up in the man of sin. He has not come yet, because the Holy Spirit is here. “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.” That word “let” means “hinder.” So we need not be dismayed when we see the working of lawlessness. Something will come in and stop it. How we have seen it over and over again! God will come in, and as long as the Spirit is here, He will hinder.

Then we are told about this man of sin, what he will be like, and what he will do. How different to Christ! He who is “God over all, blessed for evermore,” came down as a dependent man, but here we find sinful man saying that he is God, and sitting in the temple of God, a man of sin, the climax in that way, of sin in a man; and how is that going to be met? That is where we get the gain of all this. We see how God meets things if we pay attention to the word. “Then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall

destroy with the brightness of his coming.” (2 Thess. ii. 8.) You see God allows that man of sin to rise up and have all that power, with signs and lying wonders, and all that kind of thing, in order to shew the greatness of Christ. I do not believe he is going to be put down just by physical force; that would be an easy thing for God. It would be an easy thing for Him at the present time to put down those who are opposing the truth, but He bears with them in patience. God will meet things by Christ. He will set forth the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in His great and infinite superiority to all that the enemy can bring in. You see it with Christ down here. He was tempted in the wilderness; He could have said, “Get thee behind me, Satan,” at the very outset, but He bears with the temptation, and answers each temptation. How beautiful it is! He meets the enemy with the light of God, and what is pleasing to God, and He overcomes him; and so with the man of sin, the Lord will consume him with the spirit of His mouth.

How we need to possess something of that spirit of His mouth! How important that we should be really dependent upon Christ, so that we should be able to speak as He would speak! How often the servants of the Lord have failed in that way! You

remember even Paul himself, when the high priest commanded those that stood by to smite him on the mouth, answered, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall." (Acts xxiii. 3.) He had to realise he had made a mistake in speaking in that way, but with Christ, we see perfection; "the spirit of his mouth," and that is possible with us, because there is God's work in us. We need to take account of that, if the Holy Spirit is ungrieved, and we are dependent upon the Lord, we shall answer in that way, with the spirit of His mouth. That is how the Lord is going to meet things. He is going to confound the working of lawlessness, and expose it, with the spirit of His mouth.

Then He is going to destroy with the brightness of His coming. You remember when the Lord was about to be taken, He said to those that came to take Him, "Whom seek ye?" When they said, "Jesus of Nazareth," He answered, "I am," and they fell backward to the ground. That was not just physical force that threw them back, it was moral power, the power of God. Then you remember on another occasion, before His time was come, the officers were asked why they had not taken Him, and they said, "Never man spake like this man." So there is the spirit of His mouth,

and the brightness of His coming. Oh, think of all that will shine out in Christ, all that God has got in Him! I am sure of this, that Antichrist and all that is connected with him will be exposed to be a miserable failure at the end, in the brightness of His coming. Satan's world is kept going by darkness and deception, but when the thing is exposed, it is all shewn up to be worthless. I remember once, in the city of London, in broad daylight, seeing some painted-up people; I suppose they had been acting in a theatre; they might have looked all right then, or in semi-darkness, but in the bright sunshine they looked horrible. There were hurrying through the streets; they did not want to be looked at. I think it will be like that with all that is connected with Antichrist; when Jesus appears it will all be exposed. We need to learn that now, that things may be exposed in the light of Christ, in "the spirit of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming." All these things God would bring before us, and He would use the trials and difficulties and the opposition to the truth, in order that we might learn even now the power of the spirit of His mouth, and the brightness of His coming.

Now we get a beautiful end to this Epistle to the Thessalonians. It is summed up in

those words that we read, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of the Christ." It would indicate how we are led on to learn something of that love; it is like a beautiful stream, so attractive, but then it leads on to a boundless ocean, where our hearts are satisfied, but in the meantime there is the patience of the Christ. How wonderful that He can wait in patience. "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." (Psa. cx. 1). He is waiting, and the Lord is teaching us to wait. When Jesus was here He could say, "The Son can do nothing of himself save whatever he sees the Father doing: for whatever things he does, these things also the Son does in like manner." (John v. 19.) So then we learn to live on account of Him, as He said, "As the living Father has sent me, and I live on account of the Father, he also who eats me shall live also on account of me." (John vi. 57.) So all these things that are set forth in Christ are for us. If He is in patience, it is for us to be in patience, because Christ is in us—that is the work of God—and Christ in us is holy, it is to be preserved and protected and what is of Christ in us cannot sin. We need to take account of God's work in us. "Whosoever is born of God doth not

commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him ; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” So when we think of God’s work in that way, it is holy, and it is preserved, but then there is constant need of exercise and prayer, and the Lord has set that forth in Himself, “Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust.”

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