

An Evil Heart of Unbelief

"We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace. If we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us"—2 Kings 7:9

IN our public proclamation of Truth, we stress the necessity of BELIEF. We show Abraham, as exhibited by the Scriptures, a man who **believed** God, thus becoming the father of the faithful.

But do we do as good a job of teaching **ourselves** this vital lesson? Let us ponder Paul's words to the Hebrews (3:12-13):

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of YOU an evil heart of **unbelief**, in departing from the living God.

"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

We would like to especially emphasize those words, "Exhort one another **daily**"—not just once in seven days. An incident in the second book of Kings seems to fit very well into our thoughts here (2 Kings 6:24-25)—

"And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad King of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria.

"And there was a great famine in Samaria. And, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver" (or about \$52).

Then 2 Kings 7:1-2—

"Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord. Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.

the "Then a lord on whose hand the King leaned answered the man of God and said, Behold, if Lord would make windows in heaven might this thing be?

"And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof."

And in v. 20 is recorded how this apparently very unlikely prophecy was fulfilled in a remarkable way—

"And it fell out unto him; for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died."

What a lesson is exhibited here! When God speaks it is well for us to listen! And when He shows His mercy in revealing precious things concerning His Truth and His plan of Redemption, we **must** listen—or die. Let us read from Malachi:

"But unto you that fear My Name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings,

"And YE shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall, and ye shall tread down the wicked; for THEY shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. 4:2-3).

Here before us is life and death—righteousness and wickedness. Which shall be our portion?—to be with the glorious Sun of Righteousness in that wonderful day, or to be among the rejected and down-trodden wicked? How can we choose anything but the course that leads to God's way?

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BUT let us return to 2 Kings 7—

"And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate" (v. 3).

Leprous men—what does this bring to our minds? It reminds us that all Adam's children are stricken with death.

And the leprous men are beginning to reason among themselves. One said to another—

"Why sit we here until we die?

"If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there:

"And if we sit still here, we die also.

"Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die."

Their reasoning is, when pondered, found to be sound. All Adam's children know that death is our lot. But when we receive a knowledge of the Truth and take firm hold of God's promises, there is a safe deliverance. But if we just "sit here," death will surely overtake us.

So the leprous men rose up to go unto the Syrian camp —

"And when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there.

"For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host:

"And they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.

"Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life.

"And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it.

"Then they said one to another, WE DO NOT WELL."

And when we think upon these words they are the words of wisdom. They are words we all need to learn so very much. They are simple words but what a lesson they contain!

As sons of Adam, this is the thing that is so ingrained in us: everything is for ourselves! Heaping together silver and gold—this is SECURITY!

This is the all-important thing in this life. If we can't eat it, go and bury it—we just might need it someday! But let's not think of giving it to someone whom we know needs it now!

No. The lepers said—

"We do not well. This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace."

How about ourselves, brethren and sisters? When we read God's Word, is it just for ourselves?—

"If we tarry till morning light, some mischief will come upon us.

"Now therefore come that we may go and tell the king's household."

How we should lay hold of these words! We must be concerned with our brethren and sisters and those who have ears to hear the Gospel. We must be about our Father's business. We must "tell the king's household." Do not Jesus' words ring in our ears?—

"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it. But whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24).

Well, the lepers went and warned the king's household, and as a result all Israelites fed on the abundance in Samaria as the Lord had said, **except the unbeliever who was trodden upon in the gate and he died.**

But what about the lepers? If we turn to Psa. 103, I believe we get David's comment as applying to these men (vs. 3-6):

"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies;
"Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

And verse 13—

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

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WE have other examples which teach us very important lessons. In 1 Sm. 2:1-3 we read:

"And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord; my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies, because I rejoice in Thy salvation.

"There is none holy as the Lord for there is none beside Thee; neither is there any rock like our God.

"Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed."

These words are a fitting prelude to what follows, as we read from this same chapter (vs. 22-25) and get a picture of Eli's sons. This time the lesson is a little different, but also one we should always remember.

Our reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (ch. 13) speaks of love—the one great attribute which we must have. Eli truly had love, but it was in the wrong direction. He therefore stands out as a bad example, for we read that a man of God came to Eli with evil tidings because Eli honoured his sons above God (1 Sam. 2:27).

And from ch. 4 we learn the end of Eli and his sons, and it is a very pathetic story because Eli could have prevented at least his own calamity if he had chosen to obey God. God had clearly laid the issue before him (1 Sam. 2:30)—

"Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me for ever.

"But now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me; for them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

And Peter has words to the same point in his first letter—

"Honor all men. Love the Brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the King."

And we should especially honor the Great King Eternal, and King Jesus who will rule the earth in righteousness.

And "love the Brotherhood." When we are baptized into Christ, we should lose our identity as individuals, and become part of Christ. We are no longer Jews or Greeks, male or female: we are all one in Christ.

Again we turn to the words of Peter's first letter (3:10-18):

"For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.

"Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

"For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

"And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

"But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be ye troubled, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

that "And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope is in you with meekness and fear.

"Having a good conscience that, whereas they speak evil of you as evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

"For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil doing.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

And 1 Pet. 4:1-2—

"Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind. For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin—

"That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God."

NOW for just a moment we would like to think of Paul's words in 1 Cor. 13. We all know these words by heart, do we not? We have heard so many good exhortations on them—

"Though I speak with tongues of men and of angels and have not love I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge."

—and perhaps we could know our Bible so as to be able to quote it forwards and backwards, so to speak—yet if we have not love we are nothing. We recall Christ's question—

"Who are my brethren?

We know, do we not—**those who do the Father's will.**

But can we not understand a little better from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 16? He shows us where his heart was when, in speaking of those who assisted him (both brethren and sisters), he calls them "my sister," "my kinsmen," "my fellowhelpers," "my brethren." Coming down to Rufus he says:

"Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother—and mine."

Why does Paul call her his mother? We know that too. She undoubtedly was a mother in Israel to the people of God.

Brethren and sisters, let us fear God; love the brotherhood, honor the King. Let us get out of our little fleshly selves. Let us develop a spirituality, a mind to serve God and the brotherhood. Let us get on with God's work.

—B.R.