

CHAPTER 15

WE have already seen how the man of faith, whose strength is in prayer, preserves his pilgrim and priestly character in separation from the world, and dwells in Hebron—that is, he gets the support of fellowship—and is victorious over the world, while Lot falls under its power. Then the overcomer gets the blessing of the priest: he meets Melchisedek—a wonderful type of the royalty and priesthood of Christ—and in the good of the blessing “soon to fill a world of bliss” he refuses to take anything from the king of Sodom, “from a thread even to a sandal-thong.” That is the blessed superiority of faith. And if Abram would not have anything from the world he got great compensation, for he got Jehovah as his shield and exceeding great reward.

It was not a question of what God would give him, but of what God Himself would be to him. John 4 comes to one's mind when one thinks of God Himself as the portion of faith. The Lord proposes there that *the giving God* should be known, and when we consider the character of His giving we see that in giving His Son and His Spirit He is really giving Himself. His gifts are not such as can be enjoyed at a distance from the Giver, for it is Himself, as known in the Son and by the Spirit, who becomes the portion and joy of the believer. It is not as if He gave something away from Himself. So that the knowledge of God is the most priceless and blessed gain. Peter tells us that everything is given in the knowledge of God; HE is the great promise of everything; 2 Peter 1.

A shield is a defence against hostile powers, but the reward is what God is Himself to the one who knows Him. We need the shield, we could not enjoy the reward without it in presence of the power of evil. But behind the shield we enjoy God Himself. To know Himself we must know His nature, and His nature is holy love. His attributes all guard His nature, but His nature is Himself. If God's almighty love is near, how can His people lack anything that is good for them?

I think the sense of what God was to him encouraged Abram to take up the exercise as to a true seed, so that the inheritance should not be alienated. "I go childless" is really "I depart childless." There must be a true seed of faith to inherit the promises. The seed here is not Christ personally as in chapter 22 : 17, 18, but a seed innumerable as the stars of heaven—the heavenly seed of faith. So that we see Abram here in his character of 'great father,' head of the family

of faith. Galatians 3 tells us that all who are on the principle of faith are sons of Abram, and here we see his exercises as the 'great father.' It is very important, because the promises—as to their fruition in power and blessedness—could not take effect if there were no seed to inherit them. Whatever the promises were, their power and blessing would be alienated if there were not a right seed to inherit them. This gives a peculiar character to the exercises of Abram, and to the events and instruction of this chapter. Later on he becomes Abraham—"father of a multitude"—which suggests the further thought of the wide scope of blessing brought in through faith. But here the thought is of a true seed to inherit. I think we may say that Paul left a true seed in Timothy, a true child in faith, and the line was to continue.

It is stars here, and dust of the earth in chapter 13. In chapter 13 I suppose what is in view is the seed that will inherit on earth in the world to come; but the stars are typical of the heavenly seed. There is to be not only a seed as the dust of the earth, but a heavenly seed innumerable as the stars. There is to be a true seed to inherit the promises; Jehovah pledges Himself that there shall be a seed preserved right through to the inheritance. If God did not do this there would be no security that the line of faith would be preserved. Peter addresses those who had received like precious faith with the apostles, "Through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ." It is a matter of righteousness with God to preserve that holy seed; He will preserve a seed of faith right through to the inheritance. It is being preserved in the heavenly seed now, but the same principle of faith that brings saints now into heavenly blessing

will bring them into earthly blessing in another day. Abram is the 'great father' of the earthly seed for earthly blessing, and of the heavenly seed for heavenly blessing.

Then it is most important to see that as soon as the seed of faith comes into view we have the principle clearly set forth on which they have righteousness. They could not come into the divine inheritance except as having righteousness, and we get here the great principle on which it is reckoned to them. "He believed Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness." There is no more important principle in Scripture than that. It may seem a foolish principle to men, but it is God's principle. Men scoff at the idea of getting righteousness in such a way, but it is nevertheless the way all the seed come into righteousness. A man believes God, and God counts it to him as righteousness. Such a one has taken his right place before God as a guilty sinner, and he has given God His true place as a Justifier. He is really in right relations now with God, but it is not through any works of his own, but by faith. His soul, in all the reality of its condition and need, has come into contact with what God is in the blessedness of perfect grace that justifies the ungodly on the ground of redemption. He has to do with God; he believes God, who delivered Jesus for our offences, and raised Him again for our justification. His faith is reckoned to him as righteousness.

The difficulty with many is that they have never learned their unrighteousness in God's presence, and they are labouring to establish their own righteousness, but this is God's way to bring in righteousness for men. Abram simply had the bare word of God, only five

words, "So shall thy seed be." We have much more ; God tells us of the wondrous work of the cross, and the wondrous Person who did that work, and how He raised Him from the dead. We might well believe God ! The gospel comes to each soul who hears it as a direct word from God. All the seed of faith are justified and have righteousness on this principle, not of works but of faith. The first thing God did to Adam and Eve as fallen sinners was, in figure, to put righteousness on them ; He clothed them with skins. A people having the righteousness of faith alone could inherit ; we have righteousness in view of having the Spirit. It is very interesting to see that as soon as the seed of faith is spoken of the principle on which they have righteousness reckoned to them is plainly stated.

Then Abram raises another question, "How shall I know ?" It becomes an exercise as to how God will bring all to pass. And God opens up the way in which the inheritance will be brought in and possessed, both as to the ground on which all is accomplished in the death of Christ, and as to the necessary discipline through which the heirs have to pass in order that they may come into conformity with that death.

Verse 12 indicates the deep exercise needed on man's part. Except for the death of Christ I should be shut out from all blessing and be under the wrath of God. This must bring about deep exercise in any soul that takes it in. There is not a saint who has not gone through *some* exercise, and the object of it is to bring us into conformity to the death of Christ, so that we might be morally suited to the inheritance. God will bring us in *mind* into accord with the death of Christ before He has done with us : some may reach it only

on their death-bed. God as a smoking furnace and a flame of fire—the covenant-making God—passes through the divided sacrifices, as much as to say, This is My way. Abram says, How ? God answers, as it were, This way, through the death of Christ ; and all the seed must come into accord with My way. Verses 9 and 10 evidently give what is figurative of the death of Christ. Everything is brought to pass through that death. God will establish His covenant, and fulfil all His promises, and bring in faith's inheritance, through that precious death. It is not through any goodness or works on the part of Abram or the seed, but it is not brought to pass without deep exercise on their part. For it is needful that God should discipline His people and pass them through the furnace to bring them into accord with that which is the foundation of their blessing—the death of Christ. Hebrews 12 is in keeping with this chapter ; the last verse of it may be a direct allusion to what we have here ; God is spoken of as a consuming fire. The death of Christ is viewed here typically as the way by which God will make good His covenant and fulfil His promises, and bring the heirs into the inheritance. But if it is through death alone that God can do this, faith has to go through deep exercise so as to realise the necessity for it. So a horror, a great darkness, fell upon Abram, and he was made to realise the deep exercise through which alone the inheritance could be possessed.

The birds of prey coming down would suggest that the devil is always trying to take away the import of the death of Christ ; he is always trying to rob us of it in some aspect or other. Faith drives him away ; you must not allow your soul to be robbed of the

import of the death of Christ. In these days—dreadful days—people may be found in so-called Christian pulpits, instead of pouring contempt on all their pride, as the old hymn says, pouring contempt on the death of Christ by taking away all its true meaning and value. These are birds of prey, and the man of faith must be always alive to this and drive them away.

God tells Abram all that the seed will have to go through. They would have to suffer bondage for 400 years. None of us would know what liberty was if we had not learned what it was to be in bondage. Bondage to sin, the world, and Satan is set forth in the exercises of the people in Egypt, and all the seed have to learn what that means in some way, that they may appreciate and know the value of God's salvation and deliverance. They have also to learn how the world and the flesh are opposed to all that is of God, and what difficulties have to be faced on this line. And there are also the trials and sorrows which belong to a groaning creation. But God uses all this as a refining process for the seed of faith. Scripture contains much reference to the refining process that God puts His people through. He says in Isaiah 48 : 10, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." God is seen here as a smoking furnace—the Refiner of His people—and He refines according to the holiness seen in the death of Christ. What He judged in the cross, He must refine from His people in the crucible, so that nothing may be left that is unsuitable to the inheritance. Hebrews 12 shows the necessity for discipline that the sons may be partakers of God's holiness. If God could only bring the heirs into possession through the death of Christ there must be con-

formity to that death in the seed. And this is the secret of all God's exercising ways with His people.

Then the "flame of fire" suggests that God guides His people though He tests them. He never fails to guide His people and to direct their way. "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." God deals with us as sons, and He lets us know what His object is in His ways with us. We go through them in the light of His known love, and His love's purpose. A man takes pains with his son because he would like him to be fitted to take up the inheritance which may come to him; he orders all his education with that in view. So God deals with His people in view of the inheritance.

Malachi 3 : 3, 4, is very beautiful. "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver : and he will purify the children of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver ; and they shall offer unto Jehovah an oblation in righteousness. Then shall the oblation of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto Jehovah, as in the days of old, and as in former years." We see there the proper seed. In Zechariah 13 : 9, God says, "I will bring the third part into the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my name and I will answer them : I will say, It is my people : and they shall say, Jehovah is my God." The seed has become morally suitable for the inheritance, and it is the result of refining in the furnace.

At the end of the chapter Abram gets great expansion in his view of the inheritance. God had said to him before, "All the land that thou seest will I give to thee, and to thy seed for ever." But Abram had not seen the greatness of it. Here in verse 18 it is the

land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." The discipline that brings about suitability to the inheritance secures great expansion in the view of it. I daresay you have known people who have been in the furnace and felt the heat of it, who have been able to say afterwards, I would not have been without it on any account. They have got something out of it that corresponds with the end of this chapter; they have got a wider view of the inheritance.

Then discipline also produces "the peaceable fruit of righteousness"; it results in a people being brought into righteousness practically, so that they are morally suitable to the inheritance; they are partakers, too, of God's holiness.

Philippians 3 shows us a man who had been in the furnace and been refined. He rejoices in Christ Jesus and has no confidence in the flesh. He has before him "The prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." That is the expanse of the inheritance.

CHAPTER 16

IF Abram had taken in the lessons of chapter 15 he would have been preserved from the course he took in this chapter. The instruction he had in chapter 15 was that God was the source of everything—"I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." God had shown him, in figure, that the true seed would be a heavenly seed; He had called his attention to the stars, and said, "So shall thy seed be." That ought to have set aside in Abram's mind any thought that there could be a seed according to the flesh to inherit

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