

A QUIET RESTING PLACE

F.B. Meyer:

"And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God: and Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days." -- Genesis 21:33-34.

When a river is approaching its plunge down some mighty chasm, its waters flow with placid stillness; every ripple is smoothed out of the peaceful surface, and the great volume of water is hushed and quieted. There could hardly be a greater contrast than that which exists between the restfulness of the river before it is torn by the ragged rocks in its downward rush, and its excitement and foam at the foot of the falls. In the one case you can discern, through the translucent waters, the stones and rocks that line its bed; in the other you are blinded by the spray and deafened by the noise.

IS NOT THIS AN EMBLEM OF OUR LIVES?

Our Father often inserts in them a parenthesis of rest and peace, to prepare us for some coming trial. It is not invariably so. We need not always temper our enjoyment of some precious gift with a foreboding dread of its AFTERWARDS. But this, at least, is largely true: that if every season of clear-shining is not followed by a time of cloud, yet seasons of sorrow and trial are almost always preceded by hours or days or years of sunny experience, which lie in the retrospect of life, as a bright and comforting memory, where the soul was able to gather the strength it was to expend, and to prepare itself for its supreme effort.

THUS IT HAPPENED TO ABRAHAM

We have already seen how wisely and tenderly his Almighty Friend had been preparing him for his approaching trial; first, in searching out his hidden compact with Sarah; and then in ridding him of the presence of Hagar and her son. And now some further preparation was to be wrought in his spirit, through this period of peaceful rest beside the well of the oath. Leaving Gerar, the patriarch travelled with his slow-moving flocks along the fertile valley, which extends from the sea into the country. The whole district was admirably suited for the maintenance of a vast pastoral clan. In the winter the valley contains a running stream, and at any time water may be obtained by digging at a greater or less depth. Having reached a suitable camping-ground, Abraham dug a well, which is probably one of those which remain to this day; and of which the water, lying some forty feet below the surface, is pure and sweet. Drinking troughs for the use of cattle are scattered around in close proximity to the mouth, the curbstones of which are deeply worn by the friction of the ropes used in drawing up the water by hand. It is not improbably that these very stones were originally hewn under the patriarch's direction, even though their position may have been somewhat altered by the Arab workmen of a later date.

Shortly after Abraham had settled there, Abimelech, the king, accompanied by Phichol, the chief captain of his host, came to his encampment, intent on entering into a treaty which should be binding, not only on themselves, but on their children: "Swear unto me here by God, that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son" (v.23). Before formally binding himself under these solemn sanctions, Abraham brought up a matter which is still a fruitful subject of dispute in Eastern lands. The herdsman of Abimelech had violently taken away the well of water which the servants of Abraham had dug. But the king immediately repudiated all knowledge of their action. It had been done without his cognizance and sanction. And in the treaty into which the two chieftains entered, there was, so to speak, a special clause inserted with reference to this well, destined in after years to be so famous. Writing materials were not then in use; but the seven ewe lambs, which Abraham gave Abimelech, were the visible and lasting memorial that the well was his recognized property. Thus it happened that as the solemnly-sworn covenant was made beside the well, so its name became for ever associated with it, and it was called "Beersheba", the well of the oath, or "the well of the seven", with reference to the seven gifts, or victims, on which the oath was taken.

In further commemoration of this treaty, Abraham planted a tamarisk tree, which, as a hardy evergreen, would long perpetuate the memory of the transaction in those lands, where the mind of man eagerly catches at anything that will break the monotony of the landscape. There also he erected an altar, or shrine, and called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. "And Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines many days." Ah! those long, happy days! Their course was only marked by the growing years of Isaac, who passed on through the natural stages of human growth -- from boyhood to youth, and from youth to opening manhood -- the object of Abraham's tender, clinging love. No words can tell the joy of Abraham over this beloved child of his old age. "Thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest." It seemed as if perpetual laughter had come to take up its abode in that home, to brighten the declining years of that aged pair. Who could have foretold that the greatest trial of all his life had yet to come, and that from a clear sky a thunderbolt was about to fall, threatening

to destroy all his happiness at a single stroke?

WE NONE OF US KNOW WHAT AWAITS US

This at least is clear, that our life is being portioned out by the tender love of God; who spared not His own Son, and has pledged Himself, with Him, also freely to give us all things. Here is one of the unanswerable questions of Scripture: What will not God do for them that love Him? No love, no care, no wisdom, which they need, shall be spared. And yet, with all this, there may be keen suffering to bear. We sometimes seem to forget that what God takes He takes in fire: that nothing less than the discipline of pain can ever disintegrate the clinging dross of our natures; and that the only way to the resurrection life and the ascension mount is the way of the garden, the cross, and the grave. Nothing will dare to inflict so much pain -- as the love which desires the richest and sweetest life of the object of its affection. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Let us prepare then for coming hours of trial by doing as Abraham did.

(1) LET US LIVE BY THE WELL

There is a great tendency among Christians today to magnify special places and scenes which have been associated with times of blessing; and to obtain from them a supply which they store up for their maintenance in after-days. But so many of these, and of others, are in danger of forgetting that instead of making an annual pilgrimage to the well, they might take up their abode beside it, and live there.

The water of that well speaks of the life of God, which is in Jesus Christ our Lord, and is stored up for us in the fathomless depths of the Word of God. The well is deep; yet can faith's bucket reach its precious contents, and bring them to the thirsty lip and yearning heart.

One of the greatest blessings that can come to the soul is to acquire the habit of sinking wells into the depth that lieth under, and to draw water for itself. We are too much in the habit of drinking water which others have drawn; and too little initiated into the sacred science of drawing for ourselves.

It is my growing conviction that if Christians would not attempt to read so many chapters of the Bible daily, but would study what they do read more carefully, turning to the marginal references, reading the context, comparing Scripture with Scripture, endeavoring to get one or more complete thoughts of the mind of God, there would be a greater richness in their experience; more freshness in their interest in Scripture; more independence of men and means; and more real enjoyment of the Word of the living God. Oh for a practical realization of what Jesus meant when He said ! -- "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

Oh, my readers, open your hearts to the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Rest content with nothing short of a deep and loving knowledge of the Bible. Ask that within you there may be a repetition of the old miracle, "when Israel sang this song: Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it" (Numbers 21:17). Then "in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert: and the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water" (Isaiah 35:6-7).

(2) LET US SHELTER BENEATH THE COVENANT

Abraham was quiet from the fear of evil, because of Abimelech's oath. How much more sure and restful should be the believing soul, which shelters beneath that everlasting covenant which is "ordered in all things and sure." There are some Christians doubtful of their eternal salvation, and fearful lest they should ultimately fall away from grace and be lost, to whom this advice is peculiarly appropriate: "Live by the well of the oath."

In the eternity of the past, the Eternal Father entered into covenant with His Son, the terms of which covenant seem to have been on this wise. On the one hand our Lord pledged his complete obedience and His atoning death on behalf of all who should believe. And, on the other hand, the Father promised that all who should believe in Him should be delivered from the penalty of a broken law; should be forgiven, adopted into His family, and saved with an eternal salvation. This is but a crude and inadequate statement of mysteries so fathomless that the loftiest seraphs peer into them in vain. And yet it sets forth, in the babbling of human language, a truth of the utmost importance, behind which the weakest believer may securely shelter.

The one question is, Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Or, to put it still more simply, Are you willing that the Holy Ghost should create in you a living faith in the Savior of men? WOULD YOU BELIEVE IF YOU COULD? Is your will on God's side in this matter of faith? Are you prepared to surrender anything and everything that would

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hinder your simple-hearted faith in Jesus? If so, you may appropriate to yourself the blessings of the Covenant confirmed by the counsel and oath of God. Your faith may be weak; but it is faith in the embryo and germ. And as the Ark saved the squirrel as well as the elephant, so does the Covenant shelter the weakest and feeblest believer equally with the giant in faith.

This, then, becomes true of us, if we believe. We are forgiven; our name is inscribed on the roll of the saved; we are adopted into the family of God; we have within us the beginning of a life which is eternal as the life of God. "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isaiah 54:10). And shall not this comfort us amid many a heartbreaking sorrow? Nothing can break the bonds by which our souls are knit with the eternal God. "Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow" (2 Samuel 23:5).

Rejoice in all the good things which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Plant thy trees; be comforted by their shade, and fed by their fruit. Listen to the ringing laughter of thine Isaac. Dread not the future; but trust the great love of God. Live by the well, and shelter beneath the covenant. So, if trial is approaching, thou shalt be the better able to meet it with a calm and strong heart.