Judges 14:14 (John Gifford Bellett) 57113

Short Meditations, Samson's Riddle (14:14)

" Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Judg. 14:14.)

This has been abundantly illustrated in the story of this world. May I not say it is the key of the whole of it. It figuratively shows us God and the enemy at their several work-the enemy doing his work as the strong and the eater, and God, in gracious, victorious power, forcing him to yield both meat and sweetness-constantly and ever bringing good out of evil, and building new systems of wonder and glory and joy out of the ruins Satan has wrought.

I am now, however, looking at this only as it is presented to us in the earliest chapters of scripture-I mean Gen. 1-9.

Man in innocency is set in the garden of Eden; and there (as His whole creation) God is glorified and has His joy, while the creature is blest and happy.

But man loses this goodly estate. He forfeits his innocency under the temptation of the serpent, and with His innocency he loses everything.

This leads at once into a new scene. To be sure it does. But we have to ask, What do we see of man, and of the blessed God Himself there?

God makes a coat of skins for Adam, and puts it on Adam, and also another for Eve, and puts it on her.

I ask again, Was this a work more or less grateful to Him than His previous six days' work of creation? Let us consider it. At the work of creation the Lord God had materials before Him, and in beauty and in fruitfulness He was garnishing the heavens and furnishing the earth. But now He has Christ before Him, and He is occupied with that work of grace which had been the secret and counsel of His bosom in His own eternity, and which will be for wonder and joy and praise in another eternity.

And as to Adam, he, at the beginning, called his help-meet " woman," but now he calls her " Eve, because she was the mother of all living."

I ask again, In which of these names of his help-meet did Adam find his chief joy? I will let this give the answer-" He received her at the first as from himself, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; but now he receives her as the mother (and to himself the witness) of that mysterious Seed who was to conduct a controversy with the great enemy who had lately ruined Him, till He had overthrown and crushed him."

May I not now say, Can we doubt which of these was the spring of the richer joy to Adam? And besides this exultation in the spirit of Adam, there is evidence of a like joy or exultation on the lips of Eve, when she cries, " I have gotten a man from the Lord," on the birth of her firstborn. And afterward there is a striking expression of intelligent, believing triumph in Abel, when he offers the fat with the lamb upon his altar. And still further, as we do not see in Eden, saints are presented to us as calling together on the name of the Lord, as walking with God, as dying to this life and this world, and as taken to heaven. And what is all this to the heart of man? Is this more or less than innocency and the garden? Is not heaven a brighter scene than Eden could have been, had it continued man's unsoiled inheritance forever? (Gen. 1-5).

I leave these contrasts, that they may tell us whether or not the eater was forced, in that earliest moment of our history, to yield meat, and the strong one sweetness.

We come, however, to another and a later field of observation, where again we find God Himself and His creature man, as well as the ruthless eater.

Wickedness ripens itself, heads itself up to its full form, and the flood, the judgment. of God, overwhelms it. But an ark, for salvation through the judgment, is in grace prescribed by God, and in faith built by Noah. And when it is ready, all the creatures of the earth, according to God's election, I may say, come up to take their place in it. And then, in the due moment, when all are housed, Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives, and all these separated creatures of every sort, God Himself shuts them in, imparting His own strength and safety to His chosen, and making their condition as unassailable as His own throne could be.

Then, while in the ark, Noah had exercises of heart-exercises, I may say, in the Spirit. There was the opening of the window, and the mission of the raven and the dove, the taking in of the dove, and again sending her out, and again a second time taking her in with an olive leaf in her mouth; and then, the uncovering of the ark; all this having its various mystic meaning of bright and wondrous truth. And as the time comes for leaving the ark, everything goes forth just as fresh and abundant as when they went in thirteen months before; nothing wanting, however small and insignificant-nothing damaged, however tender and exposed; and all this, a second time, under the eye of Noah. What must all this have been to his spirit! What fresh and varied delight must all this have been to him, though the work of the eater had made this imprisonment in the clay of the judgment of God necessary to him. (Gen. 6-8)

And, after all this great parenthetic season, and the ark is left of all that it had carried through the judgment of God, and "the earth that now is," as Peter calls it, is trod by Noah and his ransomed host, we see his altar and his sacrifice, and God's acceptance of it. Noah takes the new world as in the name of Jesus. He enters it on the authority and by virtue of what Christ was to him. He reads his title to it in the blood of the Lamb of God, and offers his burnt-offerings of praise accordingly. The ark had been Christ to him in the day of judgment, and the kingdom that follows shall be his only through Christ. What a free-will offering was this! And what was it to the God of his salvation? We may know something of that when we read, "And the Lord smelled a sweet savor; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any

more for man's sake." Had there ever been such language in the divine bosom before? God had rested in His work of creation with infinite delight, we know. He rested, as we read, and was refreshed. But now, the value of Christ for a doomed creation is before Him, put there in all the preciousness of the blood of atonement, by the faith of a sinner who was confessing to Him, in the mysterious language of his altar, that all his title to anything and to everything was to be found in the sacrifice of His own Lamb. Before this, God had said, " It is not good that man should be alone;" but now He says " in his heart, I will not curse the ground any more for man's sake." Before this, He had seen that the work of His hand was good, but now He was smelling a sweet savor in the work of Christ.

Was not all this meat and sweetness again? The enemy had indeed approved himself an eater and a strong one, as afore he had in the garden-corrupting man outside Eden, as at the beginning he had corrupted him within it. But had not God again made him yield meat and sweetness? Were not divine delights in this scene of. redemption of a higher character than they had been in the day of creation? Is not the value of Christ more to God than all the beauty and order that are displayed in the works of His band? And is not His ransomed Noah in the ark, a richer one than Adam His creature in the garden? He was receiving the gifts of grace, and rendering the free-hearted obedience of faith; he was learning the sufficiency of Christ for him, and experiencing the exercises of the Spirit in him. He saw himself not merely in a created but in a redeemed system.

It is a great sight to see to-the eater has yielded meat, and the strong sweetness. And we are still in sight of this great mystery to the end of these chapters, after the new world has been gained, and " the earth that now is " has been formally taken and inherited. For there we see Noah seated in royal and priestly state. He is " blessed," as Adam was in his day, and told to " be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." (Gen. 1:28; 9:1.) The trail of the serpent is indeed over the whole scene and condition of things. Adam had the earth subdued to him, and the creatures of the forest, and of the field, and of the sea, and of the air, owned his lordship of them, taking names from him as it pleased him to give them, they in the acknowledgment, and he in the exercise, of sovereignty; while it is only in the dread and fear of Noah that the creatures of the earth now stand. It was no longer their homage rendered to man, but their sense of control by reason of the eminency of man. Here was the fruit and the witness of the work of the eater. But with this, Noah's table was more richly spread now than Adam's had been at first. The herb of the field nourished man then-the flesh of the beasts of the field shall now nourish him; for Adam's was the due food of an innocent one, Noah's is the food of a ransomed one. Adam enjoyed the life of an untainted creature-Noah the life of a blood-bought sinner.

Here was the witnessing afresh how meat was forced out of the eater. It was a world around, wearing the scars and bruises of a deadly fight-it was a table within, which told of full, and sure, and glorious, and blood-sealed redemption.

But further. The Lord God makes a covenant with Noah, and with all the creatures around him, that He will secure the earth from a second flood. And in token of this, He hangs the bow in the cloud, up there as under His own eye, that He may look on it, and thus remember His promise. What thoughts and words are these; and yet these are the words of the Spirit, telling us of the intimate ways of God with us, and our souls, and our circumstances! The cloud might, threaten and swell itself with water; the bow should control it. The cloud might frown; the bow should smile. The Lord should be refreshed and glorified now in the counsels of His grace, as at the first He had been in the works of His hands. And the creation was set, not in fallible, but in sure conditions.

There had been no threatening cloud in the sky of Eden; but then, there was no shining bow riding in triumph upon it. The cloud was now the witness that the eater had done his work-a deadly work-a work of forfeiture and ruin; but the bow was alike the witness that God had got meat and sweetness out of him. (Gen. 9).

Wondrous riddle! beginning to show itself here at the very first.

The fall or ruin of man has been accomplished through the subtlety of the eater, the strong man, the old serpent which is the devil and Satan; but in the midst of the ruins God Himself is gathering richer joy and brighter glory than He had known before-and as to His creature man, his communion with God is deeper and more blessed, his destinies more excellent and glorious, being either heavenly, like that of Enoch and the antediluvian saints, or in royal and priestly dignities, like that of Noah, in a redeemed and not merely a created system, with the sure tokens of God's unfailing guardianship before him.

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