

International S. S. Lesson.

October 2nd.

FREE GIVING.—EX. xxxv. 26-35.

(From the S. S. World.)

GOLDEN TEXT.—God loveth a cheerful giver.—2 Cor. ix. 7.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—All are stewards.

LESSON EXPLANATIONS.

BY JOHN HALL, D.D., NEW YORK.

In ch. xxxi. God had been giving directions to Moses as to the setting up of the sanctuary. The sin of the people described in ch. xxxii, and its consequences, detailed in the following chapters, interrupted this course of instruction. It is now resumed, and we find the people responding to the call made upon them for the materials needed. The opening part of the chapter (v. 4, onward) contains the appeal of Moses to the people. The lesson is part of the narrative of the people's contribution. It begins at v. 20 and runs on to the end of the chapter.

I. It will be convenient (first) to explain anything that appears to be obscure in the language, and then (secondly) to set out in order the general features marking this early church collection.

The making of cloths, ornamental and otherwise, and the division of labour had been carried to great perfection in Egypt, the "fine linen" of which (see Ezek. xxvii. 7) is famous in ancient literature. Hebrew women, with the capacity which has ever marked the race, even though in slavery, had acquired these arts and now used them. They were spinners and dyers. The "blue and purple," etc. (v. 25), were their handiwork and gift. "Goats' hair" (v. 26), according to Virgil, was used for tents by the Romans, as well as by the nomadic races, like the Arabs. The tent for worship was to be covered, as were the tents of his people, with goats' hair cloth. The "onyx stones," of v. 27 is the uniform translation for *shakum* in our Bible and the Vulgate, though called *sardonyx* elsewhere. We need not spend time over the exact kind of these several jewels, which only experts can commonly define. It is of more importance to know that they were to bear the names of the tribes, and be on the garments of the high priest (Ex. xxviii. 9-12). Nothing else needs explanation until we come to v. 30, where Bezaleel (already named and appointed by the Lord) is mentioned. His family and tribe are again given, as in Ex. xxxi. 2. He was of Judah, as Aholiab was of Dan (v. 34 and Ex. xxxi. 6). When it is said (v. 31) that he is "filled with the spirit of God," etc., the idea is not the same as when we speak of the "fruit of the Spirit" in the New Testament. It is true that every good and perfect gift comes from God. God the Holy Ghost—the creating Spirit—gives genius, inventive power, intellect, and every other natural gift. In a true sense we may call them all divine gifts, just as we call the sun, the stars, etc., the divine handiwork. But when the Holy Ghost works spiritual work, it is not as the creating Spirit working as when brooding over the formless earth. It is as the Comforter proceeding "from the Father and the Son," in the plan and terms of the covenant of grace, carrying out the gracious mind of God, because Christ has become the Mediator and satisfied the law of God. It is one thing for God to work as creator of all; it is another for Him to work in us to will and to do, in grace through Christ. It is one thing for the Son to make the world; it is another to bring in eternal redemption for us. It is one thing for the Holy Ghost to move on the waters bringing out order and life; it is quite another to "create us anew in Christ Jesus." There is a natural work and there is a spiritual work. Bezaleel was probably grandson of that Hur who appears in Ex. xvii. 10, staying the hands of Moses. He had understanding, etc., and dexterity of hand in all metal work, and also in the department (implying also some chemical knowledge) of the composition of the anointing oil (Ex. xxxvii. 29). All the textile work, on the other hand, was in charge of Aholiab (v. 35). Both were not only skilful to work, but also to teach and direct others.

II. We now come to the general features of this contribution.

(1). *This was not capricious benevolence.* The people did not enter upon it because they had a taste for it, or wanted something to do, or liked the "society" into which it would bring them. They did it at God's

bidding. He ordered every item of the furniture of the tabernacle, and of the dress of the priests. Nothing was left to caprice, or taste, or sense of fitness. And the materials were called for according to the nature of the articles to be made. The women's work was needed for the curtains of the tabernacle, as we see in Ex. xxx. 1-4. The women did the spinning. Dyeing was greatly and successfully practised in Egypt. This, also, they did. Aholiab and his assistants did the weaving. The women did what they could (vs. 25, 26).

Then the precious stones and spices were brought by the richer rulers, but not for the gratification of their own taste, or the perpetuation of their own names, but for a want indicated expressly by God, as we see by Ex. xxviii. 9, 10. The ephod and the breastplate were very important. So the spices were expressly ordered (see Ex. xxx. 22-38).

So Bezaleel and Aholiab did exactly as they were told. They had no margin allowed them. They did not inaugurate or illustrate a school of art. They did as the Lord commanded.

We need to learn this in our time. We have none too much benevolence and generosity; but it is to be feared some of it is thrown away through whim and caprice. That is service to God which is clearly done according to His will and in obedience to Him. He indicated clearly the service to be set up. It was rich and costly of its kind. But—

(2) *It was not an unreasonable demand God made.* They had nothing that they had not received. In bondage they learned arts to which they would have been strangers, probably, if they had continued simply a race of wandering shepherds. And as for this wealth of jewellery, &c. (in which, indeed, riches consisted in a good measure before coinage and banks became general), it cost them little. They had spoiled the Egyptians. The wealth of their oppressors had come into their hands in the terror produced by the plagues. They had received freely; they were bound to give freely.

God makes no unreasonable claims on us now. All we have is His. We but use for Him, as stewards, what is His own. And we are to serve Him with our best things.

(3) *This generosity was widely diffused.* The women are especially mentioned. It is encouraging to the sex to the end of time. And it is to the credit of woman that wherever Christian and humane work is to be done, she is foremost in it. Nor did the women refuse to spin because they were not to plan, and contrive, and execute the whole. They filled their places. And the men—the rich men and the poorer—gave in their places the jewels and the spices. This is mentioned twice (vs. 21 and 29).

The weakness of many congregations is that the women are left to do the work, and the rich are left to do the giving. It is a good sign when all do something, according to their ability. All natural powers, all genius, all artistic skill, are God's gifts, and to be used for Him. We are thus to exercise and develop spiritual graces. The strength of Samson is God's gift. When he uses it at God's bidding he is displaying grace.

(4) *All was willingly done.* This is emphasized and enlarged upon, and the cheerfulness which God loves is traced to His movement on the heart. Men naturally love their possessions, and want to keep them. But when His grace works on the heart, it is felt that the highest use of what is not needed is to devote it to God's service. They offered willingly. They did not go into debt for the tabernacle, or leave a part of its cost to be paid for by their successors, nor mortgage it, nor make it conspicuously inferior to their own tents, as though saying, "We must be comfortable and tasteful, but for God's house anything is good enough." They were not like the communities in which, in order to get a meeting, it is prudent to advertise "no collection."

(5) And, finally, *it was all orderly.* Bezaleel was presented by Moses to the people as appointed by God to receive and use their gifts. He was a man of mark, and enjoyed the confidence of all. And he and Aholiab were responsible for all they did and for all they received. There was no temptation to any one to say, "I would give, but I do not know if the gift will ever reach its object; it may never get out of the hands of these people." All this was arranged and provided against. And in this an example is set us: Givers have a right to be assured that they do not throw away their money. Hence, "reporting," "auditing," and "selection of officers" who

enjoy the confidence of the community have their places; and while mistakes have been made, and money losses incurred in benevolence, one is bold to say that they are light compared with the errors, losses, and mismanagement in joint stock companies, mines, railroads, and the like.

Now, the lesson for us is, we are God's spiritual Israel. We are brought out of Egypt. We are each to build a tabernacle for the Lord. (1) Let us give ourselves to Him according to His will. (2) Let us feel that He does not ask too much. He redeemed us as well as made us. (3) Let us keep nothing back, of memory, imagination, affections, will, body, or soul. Head and heart—let all be His. (4) Let us do this willingly. So it is with true saints (Pa. ch. 3). (5) Let us do it in an orderly way. He has a church, with membership, sacraments, services, privileges. Let us be in "the footsteps of His flock," numbered with His people here, and with the hope of being numbered with them forever.

NATHANIEL UNDER THE FIG TREE.

There are moments when the grace of God stirs sensibly in the human heart, when the soul seems to rise upon the eagle-wings of hope and prayer into the heaven of heavens; when caught up, as it were, into God's very presence, we see and hear things unspeakable. At such moments we live a lifetime; for emotions such as these annihilate all time; they

"Crowd Eternity into an hour,
Or stretch an hour into Eternity."

At such moments we are nearer to God; we seem to know Him and be known of Him; and if it were possible for any man at such a moment to see into our souls, he would know all that is greatest and most immortal in our beings. But to see us then is impossible to man; it is possible only to Him whose hand should lead; whose right hand should guide us, even if we could take the wings of the morning and fly into the uttermost parts of the sea. And such a crisis of emotion must the guileless Israelite have known as he sat and prayed and mused in silence under his fig-tree. To the consciousness of such a crisis—a crisis which could only be known to Him to whom it was given to read the very secrets of the heart—our Lord appealed. Let him who has had a similar experience say how he would regard a living man who could reveal to him that he had at such a moment looked into and fathomed the emotions of his heart. That such solitary musings—such penetrating, even in his life, "behind the veil"—such raptures into the third heaven during which the soul strives to transcend the limitations of space and time, while it communes face to face with the Eternal and Unseen—such sudden kindlings of celestial lighting which seem to have fused all that is meanest and basest within us in an instant and forever—that these crises are among the recorded experience of the Christian life, rests upon indisputable evidence of testimony and of fact. And if any one of my readers has ever known this spasm of divine change which annihilates the old and in the same moment creates or re-creates a new-born soul, such a one, at least, will understand the thrill of electric sympathy, the arrow-point of intense conviction, that shot through the heart of Nathaniel, and brought him, as it were, at once upon his knees with the exclamation, "*Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel!*"

We scarcely hear of Nathaniel again. His seems to have been one of those calm, retiring, contemplative souls, whose whole sphere of existence lies not here, but—

"Where, beyond these voices, there is peace."

It was a life of which the world sees nothing, because it was "*hid* with Christ in God;" but of this we may be sure, that never till the day of his martyrdom, or even during his martyr agonies, did

he forget those quiet words which showed that his "Lord had searched him out and known him, and comprehended his thoughts long before." Not once doubtless, but many and many a future day, was the promise fulfilled for him and for his companions, that, with the eye of faith, they should "see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."—*Canon Farrar.*

REASON AND FAITH; THEIR CLAIMS AND CONFLICTS.

"Reason and Faith," says one of our old divines, with the quaintness characteristic of his day, "resemble the two sons of the patriarch. Reason is the first born, but Faith inherits the blessing." The image is ingenious, and the antithesis striking; but nevertheless the sentiment is far from just. It is hardly right to represent Faith as *younger* than Reason, the fact undoubtedly being that human creatures trust and believe long before they reason or know. The truth is, that both Reason and Faith are coeval with the nature of man, and were designed to dwell in his heart together. They are, and ever were, and, in such creatures as ourselves, must be, reciprocally complimentary; neither can exclude the other.

It is impossible to exercise an acceptable faith without reason for so exercising it,—that is, without exercising reason, while we exercise faith,—as it is to apprehend by our reason, exclusive of faith, all the truths on which we are daily compelled to act, whether in relation to this world or the next. Neither is it right to represent either of them as failing of the promised heritage, except as both may fail alike, by perversion from their true end, and depravation of their genuine nature; for, if to the faith of which the New Testament speaks so much a peculiar blessing is promised, it is evident from that same volume that it is not a "faith without reason," any more than a "faith without works," which is commended by the Author of Christianity. And this is sufficiently proved by the injunction "to be ready to give a reason for the hope,"—and therefore for the faith—"which is in us." If, therefore, we were to imitate the quaintness of the old divine on whose dictum we have been commenting, we should rather compare Reason and Faith to the two trusty spies, "faithful amongst the faithless," who confirmed each other's report of "that good land which flowed with milk and honey," and to both of whom the promise of a rich inheritance there was given—and, in due time, amply redeemed. Or, rather, if we might be permitted to pursue the same vein a little further, and throw over our shoulders for a moment that mantle of allegory which none but Bunyan could wear long and wear gracefully, we should represent Reason and Faith as twin-born,—the one, in form and features the image of manly beauty,—the other, of feminine grace and gentleness; but to each of them, alas! is allotted a sad privation. While the bright eyes of Reason are full of piercing and restless intelligence, his ear is closed to sound; and while Faith has an ear of exquisite delicacy, on her sightless orbs, as she lifts them toward heaven, the sunbeam plays in vain. Hand in hand the brother and sister, in all mutual love, pursue their way through a world on which, like ours, day-breaks and night-falls alternate; by day the eyes of Reason are the guide of Faith, and by night the ear of Faith is the guide of Reason. As is wont with those who labour under these privations, respectively, Reason is apt to be eager, impetuous, impatient of that instruction which his infirmity will not permit him readily to apprehend; while Faith, gentle and docile, is ever willing to listen to the voice by which, alone, truth and wisdom can effectually reach her.—*Henry Rogers.*