

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM.

Abraham was the "friend of God," the "father of the faithful," a man greatly beloved. The Bible says much of the blessing that was pronounced on him. The Jew prized very highly the privilege of calling him father.

Now, what was the blessing of Abraham? I answer:

1. God covenanted to be his God. "I will establish my covenant between me and thee . . . to be a God unto thee." Thus spake Jehovah unto Abraham when he was ninety years old and nine. In so doing he engaged to be his Father and Friend, his shield and his exceeding great reward; his God to save him from wrath, to guide, to strengthen, to encourage, to sanctify and to bless abundantly. Abraham could now claim Him as his God, and trust in Him to be a God to him and to do for him what only a God could.

2. God covenanted to be not only a God to Abraham, but also to his seed after him. "I will establish My covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee; . . . and I will be their God." Abraham could now claim Him and trust in Him not only to be his own God and father and friend and shield, but also the God and father and friend and shield of his seed. The promise was to him and to his children.

3. God also covenanted to be on the side of Abraham and of his seed in the conflicts of life. "I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee." Abraham could now claim His aid for himself and his seed in all his and their battles with the enemy of souls, and trust in Him for protection and deliverance.

4. God covenanted to make of him a great nation, and to give him the land for his inheritance. "And I will make of thee a great nation;" "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, so shall thy seed be." "I will multiply thee exceedingly;" "Thou shalt be a father of many nations;" Sarah "shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore." "I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession;" "Unto thy seed have I given this land from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." There were thus opened up before Abraham prospects of greatness and glory, and a warrant was given him to trust in Him that it should be according to the promise.

5. God covenanted to make him and his seed the channel of blessing to all the nations of the earth: "Thou shalt be a blessing; in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Here the reference is to Christ. In Him, the seed of Abraham, was the blessing to be found.

Truly the blessing of Abraham was very great. Happy Abraham! whom God owned and confessed as a friend, and to whom such rich and precious promises were made. Happy, too, the children of Abraham, who were included with him in the covenant, and who were heirs of the same promises!

But how is it with us Gentiles? Have we any inheritance with the children of Abraham? Let us see.

From the epistle to the Galatians we learn the following facts:

1. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." The work of Christ was undertaken with the express view of securing for the Gentiles the blessings promised to Abraham. That work was accomplished fully and completely, and now, on the ground of it, God offers Himself in Christ to all men—to Gentile and to Jew—to be their God, their father, their friend, their shield, and their exceeding great reward. All men, Gentiles as well as Jews, have a warrant to receive Him and to trust in Him to be to them severally all that He covenanted to be to Abraham.

2. "They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." "They who are Christ's are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Every believer is one with Christ. He is, in the

highest sense of the term, the seed of Abraham. To him all the promises were made. To those who are Christ's they are fulfilled in their broadest sense. The "blessing of Abraham," therefore, belongs to every believer. It is secured to him by all the solemnities of a covenant, well ordered in all things and sure.

What follows? Every believer, every one who is Christ's, being a child of Abraham and an heir according to the promise, may say: "God in Christ is my God, my father, my friend, my shield and my exceeding great reward; He is the God of my children; I have a right to claim Him as their God and to entrust them to Him in the confidence that He will be to them all that He has covenanted to be to the seed of Abraham; He will be on their side and mine, and will bless them who bless us and curse them who curse us; I belong to a family that shall yet multiply exceedingly, as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is upon the sea shore, and shall possess the gate of his enemies, a family which has the title-deeds to the promised land and to the better country, even the heavenly of which it is a type, a family in and through which all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; I am blessed even as Abraham, the friend of God, was blessed."

When we read the story of Abraham and of the covenant with him in the light of Paul's epistles, we find it to be something more than musty annals of a dead past, in which we have no interest. On the contrary, we find it to be the record of a transaction of vital importance to us, telling us what God is to us and what we have a warrant to expect from Him as our covenant God in Christ.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."—*David A. Wallace, in United Presbyterian.*

DO OUR CHURCHES WORK?

"We propose in our church," a gentleman recently remarked to one of our best known and most useful evangelists, "so to organize our religious work that the Gospel shall not merely be put within the reach of everybody, but shall actually be carried to everybody within our parish limits." "If you do that," was the reply, "you will do what not one church in five thousand does."

Can that be true? If it be true, then practically no church does it. Do none of our churches take the Word of life in their hands and go to everybody in their town or village and invite them personally to a fellowship with Christ and His disciples? If so, then our churches fall very, very far short of their duty. Then it is not strange that we hear of old country towns in which the churches are dying out and retain but two or three male members. It is not strange that those who stand apart from our churches declare that they have lost their power and no longer take hold on the people; that they may yet be a social force, but are not a religious force to make men fear and love God and keep His commandments.

But do not our churches work? Do they not keep up their regular meetings? Do they not invite everybody? Do they not have their sociables and picnics? Do they not raise money to pay off their debts? Do they not make great efforts to raise their pastors' salaries? Are not their Sabbath schools made attractive by pictures and fountains and feasts? All true, sometimes; and all good, very good; but all this is not what the church was made for. This is not obeying the command of its founder. This is not the whole nor the first part of what the church was organized for. The command is not, "Draw;" but, "Go!" The record is: "They went everywhere preaching the Word." The story of the great apostle is that he visited not merely from city to city, but from house to house. And thus the Church grew and was glorified.

Tell us: Has your church so organized its work that every person within the limits of its local influences has the Gospel carried to him? We would like to know how many such churches there are. We should like to know the story of a church in which the roll is kept not merely of its members and families, but of its non-members. We should like to hear how they receive the faithful messages as brought to them. We should be glad to tell the story how such a church visits the outskirts, the hamlets and homes that know no Sabbath; how it reports their individual condition and history, and sends not the pastor alone to visit and advise with them, but to each one the

brother or sister in the church who can best reach their hearts. Have we many such churches? Is there more than one in five thousand? If not, why do our churches complain of their coldness and death? Again, what says the record of the Church in the days of its first love? "They went everywhere preaching the Word." And, once more, how was it that Paul could take the elders of the Church in Ephesus to record that he was "pure from the blood of all men?" It was because he could testify unto them that he had taught them both "publicly and from house to house."—*Independent.*

PSALM AND SONG.

The richness and the breadth of the Psalms are a striking contrast to the poverty and narrowness of most of our modern hymns. The latter usually affect us painfully by their exaggeration of incidental, and ignoring of principal, truths. They anthropomorphize—make divine things human things. They are often songs about the strictly human side of religion and of Christ. David would have starved to death upon such psalmody. His songs are of God; that is their most striking attribute. They make God great, glorious, eternal, in the mind of the singer or listener. They range the skies and scale the mountains to find poetic suggestions of the magnificence of Jehovah.

And is it possible that we moderns do not "like to retain God in our thoughts?"—that we have fallen into lackadaisical religious poetry because we lack both moral and doctrinal backbone? However that may be, it is, we think, the first of our religious needs to get hymns that are modelled as to their substance upon the Psalms, and to throw away fifty or more volumes of song that are only a kind of sentimental rose water. As expressions of shades of feeling, as ministering to a very narrow side of experience (one full of danger, by the way), some of the modern hymns have their use. But, after all, they are nearly backboneless. One may sing most of them with great happiness, and break every one of the ten commandments the next instant without any sense of falling away. There is nothing in most of them that is inconsistent with lying or stealing; no moral pulse in them; no moral atmosphere about them. One who has a wider experience in hymns may find a temporary use in some spiritual songs; but what about them as a staple dish for the year round? What about the probable moral character of children who grow up with no other sacred music?

The one thing that cannot be dispensed with in any hymn to be sung by a congregation is the moral and holy character and law of God. This is the keynote of the Psalms; on whatever plane they begin, they rise to this, and all below is bound under law by this highest music. Very many persons enjoy a class of hymns because they are sweet, plaintive, tender; but nothing in them suggests the law of duty or the peril of eternal death. They do not reach the religious region in experience. They are concerned with sentiments, not with religion. They may be useful in a narrow field; we seriously fear that they are being pushed into the place of real religious poetry, and that large numbers of children are growing up in a kind of sentimental heathenism.

DOING OUR BEST.

Honestly and faithfully every day to do our best, according to our opportunity, in whatever field our work lies, is to attain to a high standard of living. Sometimes we are doing this, but are discouraged because we cannot reach the measure of some other person's best. By reason of infirm health, or from lack of early training, or through the influence of hampering circumstances, our best is very imperfect. Some one else, with less effort than we bestow, is turning off superb work, is writing beautiful poetry, enchanting stories, and excellent essays; is painting the loveliest pictures and moulding the most delicate statues, is teaching a multitude, where we reach only two or three, and is, in brief, living to a far loftier purpose than ourselves. We are very apt, in considering such a contrast, and comparing it with our own disappointing and ineffectual performances, to admit a feeling of discouragement. Why toil so hard to accomplish so little? Why waste our time and strength on what will never shew? Why not leave the world's work to the hands that can do it bravely, brilliantly, and easily?

To this it may be answered, that were every one to