

## PICTORIAL LESSONS IN ETHICS

(Discourse by Brent Hislop given at the Bellingham all-day gathering, Sunday, Oct. 9, 1977.)

For the past some little while, in my personal study, I've been going over Old Testament history, mainly covering the books of Samuel and Kings. Throughout the study I've been impressed time and again with the ethical and practical lessons from the examples of various people from those ancient times.

We're going to be viewing instances in their lives as pictorial of principles both of an ethical and practical nature. And in doing this we feel it can increase the blessings of history study, and we especially commend this approach to those who might find history rather dry reading.

Our lesson is actually going to be a series of mini-lessons, very condensed because of time. There won't always be direct connections between the lessons; so having been forewarned I trust you won't get lost as we jump from lesson to lesson.

Our first lesson begins in the First book of Samuel. Turn with me to the 14th chapter. The scene of this chapter is set to the background of the army of Israel under Saul, camped in preparation for battle against the Philistine army, which vastly outnumbered Saul's forces.

The army of Israel was facing a very probable disaster and in the light of this, Saul's son, Jonathan did a very remarkable thing. Verse 6: "And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, come and let us go over unto the garrison of the uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." Jonathan was saying to his armor-bearer, let's you and I, alone, battle the entire Philistine army. In this he was not acting as rashly as it may seem. His trust in God was such that he was making himself an instrument of God to be used in this manner, if it be the Lord's will, which he discerned by laying out his fleece in verses 8 to 10. In verse 12 they received the affirmative answer and went forward and slew the fore-guard of some 20 men. And their sudden attack on this fore-guard caused a mob reaction in the Philistine camp; and that camp of 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and people as the sand of the seashore, as chapter 13, verse 5 says, broke up and fled at the hand of two lone warriors.

A fascinating account to envision actually taking place, and what a mighty demonstration of God's power; the same power that works in our lives, even in the same manner in which it worked in this account. How so? In this respect, we are encompassed about with innumerable, and of ourselves, insurmountable adversities. And though our

recourses to gain the victories are small, even if we be very weak of ourselves, it's our measure of trust and commitment to God that counts and ensures the victories. Just as Jonathan said, "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or few." Our development in righteousness through overcoming the great adversary of self is fully dependent on our utilizing God's power in our lives.

But at this point we ask the question—are gaining the victories enough? Well, let's have a look at 2 Sam. 8. In this chapter we have an account of various of David's victories in battle, and as a result of these victories, verse 6 says, he received gifts from those he had subdued. David realized that his battles were the Lord's, and that therefore the spoils were the Lord's. Verse 11 tells us that David dedicated or sanctified the spoils of silver and gold to the Lord. Sanctifying means to set apart from something and to something. Set apart from worldly use to use in religious service.

The silver and the gold were the finest of the spoils. And so with us if we view the spoils of our victories as the fruitage gained from the victories, what a lovely picture unfolds. The finest, the highest aspect of the fruitage of our victories is to use them to glorify God, setting them apart to this and away from worldly use. But how do we set apart spiritual victories from worldly use; or viewed differently, how can we use spiritual gain for temporal interest? Well, one area that comes to mind is this—it's possible that we may have gained a victory over spending too much time at some temporal interest, only to turn around and use that redeemed time in another worldly pursuit rather than a spiritual one.

A little addendum to all of this—another way we can set apart our victories to the Lord and away from self is by allowing the joy of these victories to go to the heart, stirring devotion to the Lord and not to the head.

And so it is that gaining victories are not enough in themselves, but using these victories with thanksgiving to glorify God. This is good and acceptable in His sight.

David may have set apart these spoils to the Lord by keeping them for future temple use—thus our victories glorifying God will make us meet to be a part of the antitypical temple.

In contrast to the beautiful picture of devotion David gives us here, we have the example of Saul in 1 Sam. 15, setting apart some of the spoils of his battle, but for entirely the wrong reason. He spared the Amalekite King Agag so as to make a prideful show of his victory. And he spared sheep and oxen to appease the people under the pretext that they would be for sacrifices to the Lord, prompting Samuel's reply, "to obey is better than to sacrifice."

The lessons for us are obvious. We must not make a display of our victories—if we do they are then our losses; nor should we compromise the Lord’s will for us to appease others. And let us never try and rationalize wrong actions as Saul did here. If we are wrong let’s be truly truth people, face up to it and grow thereby.

In verse 23 Samuel continues his charge against Saul, saying, “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.”

Why these comparisons—Saul’s rebellion compared to witchcraft and his stubbornness to idolatry? Well, we learn something very interesting in this connection in 1 Sam. 28:39, and that is that Saul was very zealous in purging Israel of witchcraft. And so Samuel is pointing out to him the gravity of the sin of his rebellion by showing that it’s equal to the very evil he is trying to destroy. What a marked lesson for us. Are we making great strides in some areas but compromising or even neglecting others? If this is the case it may well be that the one area of failure is equal to the very wrong that we are overcoming in another area. There is the danger too that if we allow willfulness in any area to go unchecked that it will negate the value of victories in other areas and make shipwreck of our entire faith structure.

Then the comparison of Saul’s stubbornness to idolatry and its application to us is aptly summed up by the words of a writer commenting on this text; “All conscious disobedience is actually idolatry because it makes self-will, the human I, into a god.”

Next we move on to an unrelated lesson. This is drawn in part from 1 Sam. 12:20-25, where Samuel says: “Fear not; ye have done all this wickedness; yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside, for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake; because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.”

What we want to do is to explore the background of these very familiar words of Samuel. To do this let’s turn back to the 8th chapter, where we note in verses 19 and 20 the children of Israel cried for a king to be like other nations and fight their battles, a figurehead to look up to; they also tried to justify this longing by citing in verse 5 the corruption of Samuel’s sons who were judges and that they couldn’t continue under them.

A lesson in principle in this for us may be that when we see impending troubles from a course the Lord has laid out, as He arranged Judges over Israel and allowed the troubles and greater impending troubles of Samuel's corrupt sons judging them, we are not to seek to remedy this in our way or look to the world for solutions. If we do, it will surely turn on us and ensnare us; bringing us into bondage just as verses 10 to 18 show Israel would be subjected to hardships under kings.

And with this, back to 1 Sam. 12. These words were spoken after the children of Israel had rejected the Lord in deciding to have a king. A powerful lesson for us can be drawn in this. Though we may follow a wrong course, the Lord's arm is not shortened to bring good out of it, if we continue as this verse says to fear him and follow him with all our hearts. How mighty is our God, who can work with our mistakes; and if we be rightly exercised thereby, make them stepping stones to learn by. And just a little sidelight to this—do we have the attitude exemplified by Samuel here; do we pray for and seek to help erring ones and those who disagree with us or spurn our council?

Our next lesson centers around a lesson on pride. Turn with me to 2 Sam. 18:9. The scene is set at the battle of David's army against the army of Absalom. In verse 9 we read, "And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away."

This account goes on to show that this ensnarement resulted in his death at the hand of Joab. It was his pride that got him into this situation to begin with and two things in this verse substantiate this. Note that (#1) he was riding a mule and (#2) his head was caught in the branches of a tree. We'll explain. According to *Smith's Bible Dictionary* the usage of mules in scripture indicates that they were used by kings and great ones. Emphasizing this concerning Absalom, Verse 9, according to the Hebrew should read, "And Absalom rode on the mule," pointing to his claim and unlawful ambition to the throne of Israel. Concerning the head caught in the tree, we look back to 2 Sam. 14:25, 26 which says, "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled [cut] his head (for it was at every year's end that he polled it) he weighed the hair of his head at 200 shekels after the king's weight."

What a prolific growth of hair, weighing perhaps as much as six pounds. As a strong growth of hair in these ancient days was a sign of great manly power and deemed part of his great beauty, we can well imagine that this was a great part of his personal vanity. Back to chapter 18. As Absalom rode into the forest thicket to escape David's men it may well have been that it was his long hair that entangled him in the branches of the

tree, though perhaps more likely it was both his hair entangled and his neck caught between the branches.

In this we have demonstrated that the two things that his pride exulted in: his personal appearance and his unlawful ambition were the very things that contributed to his demise. The lesson for us, well, it's clear enough: personal vanity and wrongly placed ambition, pursuit of things that we ought not to seek after can cause our spiritual impoverishment. And just an added thought to all of this, even though not directly from the example here—it's good that we do things well, but we must be so careful that this does not beget pride in us, making those things we are doing well, be our own undoing.

In our next lesson we look at one from a very interesting source. In 1 Kings 20:11 we have Ahab's fearless words to Ben-Hadad, King of Syria. BenHadad was threatening Israel with destruction unless they submitted; and Ahab said in response, verse 11, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." This verse has special meaning to me because it's my birthday Manna text. It has a good lesson for me and I think for all of us. Ahab is saying—let not him who is arming for a fight, boast as though he had already put his armour away, that is, that he had already won the battle.

And just so for us brethren; just seeing the battle and believing we will conquer is not enough. We remember the old saying that seeing the problem is half the battle; this may well be true, but it still lacks the other one-half. Being analytical and perceptive of our trials is vital, but we cannot always think them away as if perception were enough in itself. It requires vigorous warfare, application of the perception.

On to our next lesson. This is drawn from 2 Sam. 1:17-27. It is David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan. In verse 18 it says that David wanted the children of Israel taught "the bow," not the use of the literal bow, but the words of this song of lament which is called the "song of the bow"—so called to commemorate Saul and Jonathan's prowess as warriors of Israel. And in this what a largeness of heart is shown by David commending Saul as he does in verses 22 to 24. But what we especially wanted to consider were David's words of Jonathan in verse 26, "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." What a depth of expression of a love so precious. The comparison of this love, exceeding the love of women is noteworthy. I'm quoting from an early Latin Father Theodoret on this text. He said, "As they that are married are made one flesh by their union, so they that love one another perfectly are made one in the spirit by their disposition of mind."

Though the David and Jonathan type of relationship is something special and unique, that can't be had with all; the principle of such a oneness of mind is what we must seek in Christian fellowship. Paul tells us in Phil. 1:27 to have one mind, standing fast in one

spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel. Brethren, to you and me the Lord holds out the potential of Christian fellowship, the potential of a fusion of hearts and minds. And as David and Jonathan, this is a result of a very precious love for one another, a love that strives to understand, a love that is compassionate and generous, a love that cares.

On to our next lesson, a description of Elijah. 2 Kings 1:8, “He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins.” It is interesting to note that in these ancient times the girdle was an emblem of a person’s position in life. The finer girdles were made of linen, embroidered with silk and sometimes with silver or gold thread. And often by the nobles studded with gold, precious stones or pearls. But the leather girdle was the girdle worn by the poor, and Elijah in wearing a leather girdle was showing his self denial, and I like to think contempt for ostentatious show. Do we likewise exercise restraint and even self-denial in worldly things. And do we, as did Elijah, identify ourselves with the common folk of the humbler walks of life? Our Lord did; He didn’t, nor should we hold ourselves aloof from these. Ours is not a social reform gospel to alleviate the ills of society at this time—that is kingdom work. But if we fail now to feel their pain and learn from this aspect of human experience, having an elitist attitude, we’ll not have a part in that day of reform. Brethren we must avoid any contamination of the worldly spirit; and yet, locking ourselves away from the world is not the way to accomplish this. We must walk amongst the people. It is wrought with great danger and yet how often have we not found that the things of the greatest worth are often those which have the greatest dangers.

Our next lesson is loosely related to this. Let’s turn to 2 Kings 5. In this chapter we have the account of Naaman being healed of leprosy. After his healing he came back to Elisha who the Lord had used in overseeing the healing, by the washing in the Jordan. He expressed his gratitude to Elisha and said when he returned to Syria he would (verse 17) “...henceforth offer neither burnt offerings nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord.” He recognized the Lord in his miraculous healing, but then he went on in verse 18—he asked forgiveness when he went into the house of the idol Rimmon with his master, the King of Syria, and bowed himself down. How did Elisha respond to this? Did he see it as ingratitude or hypocrisy? His response was, verse 19, “Go in peace.”

This response is very significant. The Pastor suggests in Reprint page 3440 and 2348 that Elisha could say this because Naaman was not an Israelite in covenant relationship with God. What a lesson for us brethren. We the spiritual Israel of God, must not judge the world by our standards. Though we cannot condone unrighteousness and should let this be apparent, let it be equally apparent to the world that we are compassionate towards them, separating the sin from the sinner. In doing this we will be more effectively able to both, learn as we should in our experiences with the world and reach out and help where we can.

Our next lesson from 1 Kings 19 is perhaps the hardest to condense and do justice to. The lesson centers around the vision of the wind, earthquake and fire in verses 11 and 12. We believe this was antitypically a vision given to the church immediately following 1914. We'll explain. From our Volume studies we remember the background to the 3½ years drought picturing the 1260 years ending in 1799, with Elijah in the wilderness during this time. But note in the opening verses of chapter 19, which follows directly after the end of the drought, that Elijah had to again flee to the wilderness. Just so following 1799 the church was yet separated in a wilderness condition, the slaying of the prophets of Baal at the end of the 3½ years, the punishments on Papacy at the end of the 1260 years, the French Revolution, not bringing about the full reforms which the Elijah class sought.

Elijah discouraged laid down and slept wishing to die, but the Lord sustained him. In verses 5 and 6 he was fed. This we believe to correspond with the blessings given through the Millerite movement, the stirring of the virgin class in Matt. 25; but just like those virgins, Elijah slumbered. But again Elijah was awakened and fed, picturing the time of the Second Advent, 1874. And on the strength of this food he went 40 days and nights to Mt. Horeb (Sinai).

The forty years, 1874 to 1914, reaching to Horeb the mount of God, pointing to the ending of the Gentile Times, opening the way for the full establishment of the kingdom. But note once at Sinai he was discouraged saying in verse 10, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken their covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain tiny prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

Just so having reached 1914 the brethren were somewhat shaken and confused—things hadn't happened as they expected. And in response to this confusion, the Lord granted the fuller insight that the kingdom establishment was not to end in 1914 but at that point begin the tearing down aspect. And that it would be gradual, with winds of war, earthquakes of revolution and fire of anarchy before the still small voice.

After this vision was given what did Elijah do? Why he went back to the cave and in verse 14 lamented the same lament as in verse 10. Elijah was still discouraged, the vision did not fully satisfy his needs. But what more did he need? How the Lord responded to this reveals what the need was. Elijah needed also to know what to do. Just so it was for the brethren after 1914. It wasn't enough to know how the age would end but also they needed to know what to do during this time. To Elijah the Lord responded by giving him three commissions to do and he was also told that he was not alone; that there were yet 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal and just so in our day there are many sincere persons not steeped in the erroneous doctrines who constitute a class whom we can try

and reach with the reasonableness of the message of truth, and it should be that one or two may have a hearing ear.

Concerning the commissions to Elijah we have at best only conjectures as to what may be meant by the anointing of the two kings, though it is noteworthy that both of these anointings took place after Elijah had been taken up in the whirlwind. However our ethical and practical lesson is drawn from the principles involved in the overall picture. Simply that understanding of this facet of truth of how the age ends, and indeed all facets of truth are not enough; further we must seek out what to do in response to that understanding. Our vision of truth is not complete with a mere head knowledge. It's full scope is not realized unless the doctrines and precepts of truth animate our lives; unless we are living and experiencing their meaning to us in our daily walk.

Our last lesson dear brethren is drawn from various texts where we are going to be focusing in on one main theme. In various instances particularly in battles, the Lord said He wanted the army of Israel, or lone individuals as may have been the case to fight against much greater enemies and He wanted them to do this for a very specific reason, as with David against Goliath in 1 Sam. 17:46; as with Elijah against all the prophets of Baal, in 1 Kings 18:36; and as with Israel under Ahab against the Syrians in 1 Kings 20:13. The reason being that through the victory of the weaker over the much stronger, the Lord said, it will be known that "I am the Lord."

Are we as Paul, glorifying in our infirmities and weaknesses, so that our strength is made perfect in weakness? Are we taking pleasure—the Greek word means—"thinking well of, approving" as he says in 2 Cor. 12:10, "in infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake, knowing that when we are weak, then we are strong."

Are we glorying in necessities? The Greek word means "the things that must be," meaning perhaps a very difficult situation. Are we willing to have this so in our lives that through our weakness and amid the difficulty, the Lord may make it known that "He is the Lord," both to us now, and to the world in the kingdom, as they see how He has worked His miracles in our lives, bringing the victory amid such adversity and weakness.

Brethren, the victory is ours, through the Lord's strength, and let's use the daily victories to glorify God. May the Lord bless us in this good work.