

## "The Second Man . . . From Heaven"

1 Corinthians 15: 47.

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The birth of Joseph, recorded in Genesis 30, would seem to indicate a point of departure in the history of Jacob. Prior to this he had, for many years, dwelt in conditions marked by intrigue, change and deceit (Genesis 31: 7), with little apparent communion with his God. *Typically* the atmosphere of Laban's house was completely out of accord with the mind of God. It is the purpose of God that Christ — "the Second Man" (1 Corinthians 15: 47) should have first place in all things; whereas the principle obtaining in Laban's country refused to recognize that the *second* must be *first* (Genesis 29: 26). Blessed indeed if we have the fervent desire to constantly breathe the atmosphere of a realm where Christ is supreme — "that in all things *He* might have the pre-eminence" (Colossians 1: 18).

It was when Joseph came into view that Jacob desired to return to his "own country" and although he was at times marked by failure, yet definite progress of soul became apparent, his affections reached beyond Bethel — *the place*, to El-Bethel — *to God* Himself. He is now Israel — a prince — before his God. In his conversation with Esau he confesses that the substance he had acquired was really the result of God's graciousness to him, and in reply to Esau's remark — "I have enough" — Jacob can say, as he acknowledges God's goodness, "I have *everything*" (Genesis 33: 11).

Later he was privileged to see Joseph in his exaltation and glory, and viewing his life in retrospect he attributes all to the God who had blessed him *all his days* — even the years spent in Padan-aram! What a tribute to the faithfulness of God! Jacob's affections and thoughts are now in full accord with the mind of the blessed God as he wittingly and deliberately puts Ephraim the younger before Manasseh the elder, saying — "I know it, my son, I *know* it." The last reference to him in the Scriptures carries its own unique touch, he alone of all the names in Hebrews 11 is said to be a "worshipper."

What blessed results accrue when Christ, Joseph's glorious Antitype, fills the vision of the soul! The hymn writer has expressed it in those simple words-

"O what blessing now through grace  
Treasured up in Christ we know;  
Glory beaming in His face,  
Shines upon us here below."

Saul of Tarsus was completely transformed by the impact made upon his circumstances and upon himself by the risen and glorified Christ. Roman by birth, "a citizen of no mean city" — "free-born" (Acts 22: 28); a Jew by religion, he profited in Judaism above many his equals, being exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers (Galatians 1: 14); brought up at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22: 3); of the seed of Abraham and of the tribe of Benjamin; a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Few, if any, in his day possessed the outstanding abilities of this truly remarkable Israelite. But the circle in which he moved, revolving as they did around the pride and self-seeking of man away from God, had no appreciation, either in their standing or religion or culture, of the one blessed Man in whom everything was centred for the glory of God. Paul's discourse before Agrippa, as related in Acts chapter 26, shews the

vehemence with which he did "many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," and his exceeding madness against the followers of Christ. As a "young man" (Acts 7: 58) he was truly characterized by the features predicated of Benjamin, from whom he sprang by birth — "Benjamin, as a wolf will he tear to pieces; In the morning he will devour the prey" (Genesis 49: 27, New Trans.); "He made havoc of the church;" he breathed "out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 8 and 9). Having vented his fury on the believers in Jerusalem he pursues his headlong course towards Damascus when, suddenly, "light from heaven" dispels the influence of earthly glories, and the voice of the risen Lord silences the tumult of his rebellious intent. The light which brought the arrogant Pharisee to the ground, is now to be the illumination of his pathway, as a "chosen vessel" — one who should bear the Name (which hitherto he sought to exterminate), "before the Gentiles, and kings, and the people of Israel." The voice which he heard secured, on the one hand, his obedience to the will and authority of Christ as Lord, and also filled his heart with an ever deepening sense of the grace and mercy of the One who had met him in infinite love. His previous circumstances of affluence and power become completely untenable as his affections perceived the preciousness of Christ in glory. The self-willed assertive Saul of Tarsus becomes, as Paul the apostle, "less than the least of all saints." Christ is now his Object; for him to live is Christ; in all things and at all times Christ should be magnified in his movements here; he would "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." For Him he had suffered the loss of that which he beforehand had prized — and yet in the experience of Christ's love as his satisfying portion he could say "I have all things in full supply and abound" (Philippians 4: 18 New trans.). Suffering as perhaps no other follower of Christ suffered, his heart was so full of heavenly joy and peace that over and over again he breaks forth in those precious doxologies which adorn the pages of Scripture.

As to those whom he previously had persecuted his one desire was that Christ should be pre-eminent in their affections — His preciousness the abiding portion of their hearts. He is, in his movements and service toward them, seen as having the affection of a father, a nurse cherishing her own children, and as a mother. To him was committed the administration of the truth in its exceeding fullness; the Ephesian epistle with its precious unfolding of the "mystery;" the Lord's Supper in Corinthians; the truth of the rapture in Thessalonians; ministry which exalts the Person of Christ before His saints and fills their hearts with the boundless joy and blessedness of union with Himself. He thus "divides the spoil." As finishing his course, having "combated *the good combat*" (cf. 2 Timothy 4) he exhorts his child in the faith, Timothy, to continue in the pathway of devoted service to the Lord and to His own — being ever mindful of those things which he had learned and of which he had been fully persuaded "knowing of whom" he had learned them. In his letter to Philemon his compassionate desires for Onesimus and for Philemon himself shew how deeply, as Paul the aged, he had drunk into the fountain of love so perfectly expressed in Christ.

The richness of the ministry and its atmosphere of glory with which the Risen Lord entrusted His servant would enhance before us the greatness of God's eternal thoughts and purpose; and as recognizing the wonderful transformation in the Apostle's life which the impact of Christ in glory effected, would not our own hearts face the challenge as to how far *our* lives have been affected in a positive sense by the ministry given through him, and what increase of response in praise and worship to God has accrued. Paul's ministry, so often belittled in our day, would, in the Holy Spirit's power, hold our affections in relation to a realm where Christ — "the *Second Man*" — is pre-eminent, and would hold us in fidelity of heart to our absent Lord as we tread our pathways through the scene in which "the *first man*" dishonours His precious Name and rejects His authority and rights.